BABES IN THE BUSH

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

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BY

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'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' 'THE MINER'S RIGHT,' 'THE SQUATTER'S DREAM,'
'A COLONIAL REFORMER,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

'FRESH FIELDS AND PASTURES NEW'

'WHAT letter are you holding in your hand all this time, my dear?' said Captain Howard Effingham to his wife during a certain family council.

'Really, I had almost forgotten it. A foreign postmark—I suppose it is from your friend Mr. Sternworth, in Australia or New Zealand.'

'Sternworth lives in New South Wales, not New Zealand,' returned he rather testily. 'I have told you more than once that the two places are a thousand miles apart by sea. Yes! it is from old Harley. When he was chaplain to our regiment he was always hankering after a change from routine duty. Now he has got it with a vengeance. He was slightly eccentric, but a better fellow, a stauncher friend, never stepped.'

'Don't people go to Australia to make money?' asked Rosamond Effingham, a girl of twenty, with 'eldest daughter' plainly inscribed upon her thoughtful features. 'I saw in a newspaper that some one had come home after making a fortune, or it may have been that he died there and left it to his relatives.'

'Sternworth has not made a fortune. He is not the man to want one. Still, he seems wonderfully contented and raves about the beauty of the climate and the progress of his colony.'

'Let me read his letter out,' pleaded the anxious wife softly, and, with a gesture of assent, the father and daughter sat expectant.

Mrs. Effingham had the gift of reading aloud with effect, which, with that of facile, clear-cut composition, came to her

as naturally as the notes of a song-bird, which indeed her tuneful voice resembled.

'The letter is dated from Yass—(what a funny name! a native one, I suppose)—in New South Wales, and June the 20th, 1834. Nearly six months ago! Does it take all that time to come? What a long, long way off it must be. Now then for the contents.

'My dear Effingham—I have not written for an age—though I had your last in reply to mine in due course—partly because, after my first acknowledgment, I had nothing particular to say, nor any counsel to offer you, suitable for the situation in which you appear to have landed yourself. When you were in the old regiment you were always a bad manager of your money, and the Yorkshireman had to come to your assistance with his hard head more than once. I thought all that sort of thing was over when you succeeded to a settled position and a good estate. I was much put out to find by your last letter that you had again got among the shallows of debt. I doubt it is chronic with you. But it is a serious matter for the family. If I were near you I would scold you roundly, but I am too far off to do it effectually.

'My reason for writing now—for I am too busy a man to send the compliments of the season across the globe—is that a tempting investment in land—a perfect gift, as the phrase is—has come to my knowledge.

'Now, I am not hard-natured enough to tempt you to come here with your amiable wife, whose praises, not always from yourself, I have often heard—[really, my dear, I had no idea you paid me compliments in your letters to your friends]—and your tenderly nurtured family; that is, if you can retain your position, or one in any way approaching it. But I know that the loss of fortune in the old country entails a more complete stripping of all that men hold dear, than in this new land, where aristocratic poverty, or rather, scantiness of money, is the rule, and wealth, as yet, the exception.

'I cannot believe that you are *totally* without means. Here, cash is at a premium. Therefore, if you have but the shreds and fragments of your fortune left, you may still have capital available from the wreck sufficient to make a modest venture, which I shall explain.

'A family long resident near this rising town—say forty or fifty miles distant—have been compelled, like you, to offer their estate for sale. I will not enter into the circumstances or the causes of the step. The fact that we are concerned with is, that a valuable property—as fair judges consider it—comprising a decent house and several thousand acres of good land, may be bought for three or four thousand pounds.

'I do not hide from you that many people consider that the present bad times are likely to last, even to become more pressing. *I* fully expect a reaction. If you can do better in any way I do not ask you for one moment to consider this matter, much as I should like to see my old comrade and his family here.

'But if otherwise, and the melancholy life of the ruined middle-aged Briton stares you in the face, I say boldly, do not go to Boulogne, or other refuge for the shady destitute, where a man simply counts the days which he must linger out in cheap lodgings and cheese-paring idleness, but come to Australia and try a more wholesome, more manly, if occasionally ruder life. I know what you home-keeping English think of a colony. But you may find here a career for your boys—even suitable marriages for your girls, whose virtues and accomplishments would doubtless invest them with distinction.

'If you can get this sum together, and a few hundreds to have in your pocket at landing, I can guarantee you a livelihood—you know my caution of old—with many of the essentials, God forbid I should say *all*, of "the gentle life." Still, you may come to these by and by. The worst of my adopted country is that there is a cruel uncertainty of seasons, at times sore on man and beast. That you must risk, like other people. If you come, you will have one friend here in old Harley Sternworth, who, without chick or child, will be proud to pour out whatever feelings of affection God has given him, into the lap of your family. If you decide on coming, send a draft for three thousand pounds payable to my order at once. I will manage the rest, and have Warbrok ready to receive you in some plain way on your arrival. So farewell for the present. God bless you and yours, says your old friend, HARLEY STERNWORTH.'

As the letter disclosed this positive invitation and plan of emigration which, whether possible or impossible, was now brought into tangible form, the clasp in which lay the father's hand and the daughter's slightly tightened. Their eyes met, their faces gradually softened from the expression of pained endurance which had characterised them, and as the clear tones of the reader came to an end, Rosamond, rising to her feet, exclaimed, 'God has sent us a friend in our need. If we go to this far land we may work together and live and love undivided. But oh, mother, it breaks my heart to think of *you*. We are young, it should matter little to us; but how will you bear to be taken away from this pleasant home to a rude, waste country, such as Australia must be?'

'My darling,' said the matron, as she folded the letter with an instinctive habit of neatness, and handed it to her husband, 'the sacrifice to me will be great, far greater than at one time I should have thought it possible to bear. But with my husband and children are my life and my true dwelling-place. Where they are, I abide thankfully to life's close. Strength, I cannot doubt, will be given to us all to bear our—our——'

Here the thought, the inevitable, unimaginable woe of quitting the loved home of youth, the atmosphere of early friendship, the intertwining ties of relationship, completely overcame the courage of the speaker. Her eyes overflowed as, burying her face in her husband's arms, which were opened to receive her, she wept long and silently.

'How could we think of such a thing, my darling, for one moment?' said Effingham. 'It would kill you to part, at one blow, from a whole previous existence. I hardly foresaw what a living death it would be for you, more than all, to leave England *for ever*. There is a world of agony in that thought alone! I certainly gave Sternworth a full account of my position in my last letters. It was a relief. He has always been a true friend. But he has rashly concluded that we were prepared to go to his wild country. It would be your death-blow, darling wife; and then, what good would our lives be to us? Some of our friends will help us, surely. Let us live quietly for a year or two. I may get some appointment.'

'It relieves my bursting heart to weep; yet it will fit me

for future duty. No, Howard, we must not falter or draw back. You can trust, I know, in Mr. Sternworth's practical wisdom, for you have a hundred times told me how far-seeing, shrewd, and yet kindly he was. In his plan there is the certainty of independence; together we can cheer each other when the day's work is done. As for living in England, trusting to the assistance of friends, and the lingering uncertainty of a provision from the Government, I have seen too many families pitiably drifting towards a lower level. There is no middle course. No! Our path has been chosen for us. Let us go where a merciful Providence would seem to lead us.'

The fateful conference was ended. A council, not much bruited about, but fraught with momentous results to those yet unborn, in the Effingham family, and it may be to other races and sections of humanity. Who may limit the effects produced in the coming time, by the transplantation of but *one* rarely endowed family of our upward-striving race?

Nothing remained but to communicate the decision of the high contracting parties of the little state to the remaining members. The heir was absent. To him would have been accorded, as a right, a place in the parliament. But he was in Ireland visiting a college chum, for whom he had formed one of the ardent friendships characteristic of early manhood. Wilfred Effingham was an enthusiast—sanguine and impulsive—whose impulses, chiefly, took a good direction. His heart was warm, his principles fixed. Still, so sensitive was he to the impressions of the hour, that only by the sternest consciousness of responsibility could he remain faithful to the call of duty.

Devoted primarily to art and literature; sport, travel, and social intercoures likewise put in claims to his attention and mingled in his nature the impulses of a refined Greek with the energy and self-denial of his northern race.

It must be confessed that these latter qualities were chiefly in the embryonic stage. So latent and undeveloped were they, indeed, that no one but his fond mother had fully credited his possession of them.

But as the rounded limbs of the Antinous conceal the muscles which after-years develop and harden, so in the graceful physique and sensitive mind of Wilfred Effingham

lay hidden powers, which, could he have foreseen their future exercise, would have astonished no one more than himself. Such was the youth recalled from his joyous revel in the Green Isle, where he had been shooting and fishing to his heart's content.

A letter from his mother first told that his destiny had been changed. In a moment he was transformed. No longer was he to be an enjoyer of the hoarded wealth of art, letters, science, sitting on high and choosing what he would, as one of the gods of Olympus. His lot, henceforth, would be that of a toiler for the necessaries of life! It was a shrewd blow. Small wonder had he reeled before it! It met him without warning, unsoftened, save by the tender pity and loving counsel so long associated with his mother's handwriting. The well-remembered characters, so fair in delicate regularity, which since earliest schooldays had cheered and comforted him. Never had they failed him; steadfast ever as a mother's faith, unfailing as a mother's love!

Grown to manhood, still, as of old, he looked, almost at weekly intervals, for the missive, ever the harbinger of home love, the herald of joy, the bearer of wise counsel—never once of sharp rebuke or untempered anger.

And now—to the spoiled child of affection, of endowment—had come this message fraught with woe.

A meaner mind, so softly nurtured, might have shrunk from the ordeal. To the chivalrous soul of Wilfred Effingham the vision was but the summons to the fray, which bids the knight quit the tourney and the banquet for the stern joys of battle.

His nature, one of those complex organisms having the dreamy poetic side much developed, yet held room for physical demonstration. Preferring for the most part contemplation to action, he had ever passed, apparently without effort, from unchecked reverie and study to tireless bodily toil in the quest of sport, travel, or adventure. Possessed of a constitution originally vigorous, and unworn by dissipation, from which a sensitive nature joined with deference to a lofty ideal had hitherto preserved him, Wilfred Effingham approached that rare combination which has ere now resulted, under pressure of circumstance, in the hero, the poet, the warrior, or the statesman.

He braced himself to withstand the shock. It was a shrewd buffet. Yet, after realising its force, he was conscious, much to his surprise, of a distinct feeling of exaltation.

'I shall suffer for it afterwards,' he told his friend Gerald O'More, half unconsciously, as they sat together over a turf fire which glowed in the enormous chimney of a rude but comfortable shooting lodge; 'but, for the soul of me, I can't help feeling agreeably acted upon.'

'Acted upon by what?' said his companion and college chum, with whom he had sworn eternal friendship. 'Is it the whisky hot? It's equal to John Jameson, and yet it never bothered an exciseman! Sure that same is amaylioratin' my lot to a degree I should have never believed possible. Take another glass. Defy Fate and tell me all about it. Has your father, honest man, discovered another Roman tile or Julius Cæsar's tobacco-pouch? [the elder Effingham was an antiquarian of great perseverance], or have ministers gone out, to the ruin of the country, and the triumph of those villains the radicals? 'Tis little that ever happens in that stagnant existence that you Saxons call country life, barring a trifle of make-believe hunting and shooting. Sure, didn't me uncle Phelim blaze away into a farmer's poultry-yard in Kent for half-an-hour, and swear (it was after lunch) that he never saw pheasants so hard to rise before.'

Thus the light-hearted Irishman rattled on, well divining, for all his apparent mirth, that something more than common had come in the letter, that had the power to drive the blood from Wilfred's cheek and set Care's seal upon his brow. That impress remained indelible, even when he smiled, and affected to resume his ordinary cheerfulness.

At length he spoke: 'Gerald, old fellow! there is news from home which most people would call bad. It is distinct of its kind. We have lost everything; are ruined utterly. Not a chance of recovery, it seems. My dear mother bids me understand *that* most clearly; warns me to have no hope of anything otherwise. The governor has been hard hit, it seems, in foreign bonds; Central African Railways, or Kamschatka telegraph lines,—some of the infernal traps for English capital at any rate. The Chase is mortgaged and will have to go. The family must emigrate. Australia is to

be the future home of the Effinghams. This appears to be settled. That's a good deal to be hid in two sheets of note-paper, isn't it?' And he tossed up the carefully directed letter, caught it as it fell, and placed it in his pocket.

'My breath is taken away; reach me the whisky, if you wish to save my life, or else it will be——' (prompt measures were taken to relieve the unfortunate gentleman, but without success). 'Wilfred, me dear fellow, do you tell me that you're serious? What will ye do at all, at all?'

'Do? What better men have had to do before now. Face the old foe of mortals, Anagkaia, and see what she can do when a man stands up to her. I don't like the idea any the worse for having to cross the sea to a new world, to find a lost fortune. After all, one was getting tired of this sing-song, nineteenth century life of fashionable learning, fashionable play, fashionable work—everything, in fact, regulated by dame Fashion. I shall be glad to stretch my limbs in a hunter's hammock, and bid adieu to the whole unreal pageant.'

'Bedad! I don't know. I'd say the reality was nearer where we are, with all the disadvantages of good dinners, good sport, good books, and good company. But you're right, me dear fellow, to put a bold face on it; and if you have to take the shilling in the divil's regiment, sure ye'll die a hero, or rise to Commander-in-Chief, if I know ye. But your mother, and poor Miss Effingham, and the Captain—without his turnips and his justice-room and his pointers and his poachers, his fibulæ and amphoræ—whatever will he do among blackfellows and kangaroos? My heart aches for ye all, Wilfred. Sure ye know it does. If ye won't take any more potheen, let us sleep on it; and we'll have a great day among the cocks, if we live, and talk it over afterwards. There never was that sorrow yet that ye didn't lighten it if ye tired your legs well between sun and sun!'

With the morrow's sun came an unwonted calm and settled resolve to the soul of Wilfred Effingham. Together, gay, staunch Gerald O'More and he took the last day's sport they were likely to have for many a day. The shooting was rather above than under the average, as if the ruined heir was willing to show that his nerves had not been affected by his prospects.

'I must take out the old gun,' he said, 'and keep up my

shooting. Who knows but that we may depend upon it for a meal now and then in this New Atlantis that we are bound for. But one thing is fixed, old fellow, as far as a changeable nature will permit. I shall have to be the mainstay of my father's house. I must play the man, if it's in me. No more dilettantism, no more mediæval treasures, no more tall copies. The present, not the past, is what we must stand or fall by. The governor is shaken by all this trouble; not the best man of business at any time. My dear mother is a saint *en habit de Cour;* she will have to suffer a sea-change that might break the hearts of ordinary worldlings. Upon Rosamond and myself will fall the brunt of the battle. She has prepared herself for it, happily, by years of unselfish care and thought. I have been an idler and a loiterer. Now the time has come to show of what stuff I am made. It will mean good-bye to you, Gerald O'More, fast friend and *bon camarade.* We shall have no more shooting and fishing together, no more talk about art and poetry, no more vacation tours, no more rambles, for long years—let us not say for ever. Good-bye to my old life, my old Self! God speed us all; we must arm and away.'

'I'd say you might have a worse life, Wilfred, though it will come hard on you at first to be shooting kangaroos and bushrangers, instead of grouse and partridges, like a Christian. But we get used to everything, I am told, even to being a land-agent, with every boy in the barony wondering if he could tumble ye at sixty paces with the ould duck gun. When a thing's to be done—marrying or burying, standing out on the sod on a foggy morning with a nate shot opposite ye, or studying for the law—there's nothing like facing it cool and steady. You'll write me and Hallam a line after you're landed; and we'll think of ye often enough, never fear. God speed ye, my boy! Sure, it's Miss Annabel that will make the illigant colonist entirely.'

The friends parted. Wilfred lost no time in reaching home, where his presence comforted the family in the midst of that most discouraging state of change for the worse, the packing and preparing for departure.

But he had utilised the interval since he left his friend by stern self-examination, ending in a fixed, unalterable resolve. His mother, his sisters, and his father were alike surprised at

his changed bearing. He had grown years older in a week. He listened to the explanation of their misfortune from his father with respectful silence or short, undoubting comment. He confirmed the decision to which the family counsel had arrived. Emigration to Australia was, under the circumstances, the only path which promised reparation of the fortunes of the house. He carefully read the letter from Mr. Sternworth, upon which their fate seemed to hang. He cheered his mother by expressing regret for his previous desultory life, asking her to believe that his future existence should be devoted to the welfare of all whom both held so dear.

'*You* have never doubted, my dearest mother,' he said, 'but that your heedless son would one day do credit to his early teaching? I stand pledged to make your words good.'

The arrival of the heir, who had taken his place at his father's right hand in so worthy a spirit, seemed to infuse confidence into the other members of the family. Each and all appeared to recognise the fact that their expatriation was decided upon, and while lamenting their loved home, they commenced to gather information about their new abode, and to dwell upon the more cheering probabilities.

The family was not a small one. Guy Effingham was a high-spirited schoolboy of fourteen, whose cricket and football engagements had hitherto, with that amount of the humanities which an English public schoolboy is compelled to master, under penalties too dire for endurance, been sufficient to fill up his irresponsible life. It was arranged that he was to remain at school until the week previous to their departure. His presence at home was not necessary, while his mother wished him to utilise the last effective teaching which he was likely to have. To her was committed the task of preparing him for his altered position. Two younger daughters, with a boy and girl of tender years, the darlings of the family, completed the number of the Effinghams. The third daughter, Annabel, was the beauty of the family. A natural pride in her unquestioned loveliness had always mingled with the maternal repression of all save the higher aims and qualities which it had been the fond mother's life-long duty to inculcate. Annabel Effingham had received from nature the revival of the loveliness of some ancestress, heightened and intensified by admixture of family type. She was fair, with the bright colouring, the silken hair,

the delicate roseate glow which had long been the boast of the women of her mother's family—of ancient Saxon blood—for many generations. But she had superadded to these elements of beauty a classical delicacy of outline, a darker shade of blue in the somewhat prouder eye, a figure almost regal in the nobility of carriage and unconscious dignity of motion, which told of a diverse lineage. Beatrice, the second daughter of the house, had up to the present time exhibited neither the strong altruistic bias which, along with the faculty of organisation, characterised Rosamond, nor the universally confessed fascination which rendered Annabel's path a species of royal progress. Refined, distinguished in appearance, as indeed were all the members of the family, she had not as yet developed any special vocation. In her appearance one saw but the ordinary traits which stamp a highly cultured girl of the upper classes. She was, perhaps, more distinctly literary in her tastes than either of her sisters, but her reserved habits concealed her attainments. For the rest, she appeared to have made up her mind to the inevitable with less apparent effort than the other members of the family.

'What can it avail—all this grieving and lamenting?' she would say. 'I feel parting with The Chase, with our relations and friends—with all our old life, in fact—deeply and bitterly. But that once admitted, what good end is served by repeating the thought and renewing the tears? Other people are ruined in England, and have to go to Boulogne and horrid continental towns, where they lead sham lives, and potter about, unreal in everything but dulness and poverty, till they die. We shall go to Australia to *do* something—or not to do it. Both are good in their way. Next to honest effort I like a frank failure.'

'But suppose we *do* fail, and lose all our money, and have nothing to eat in a horrid new country,' said Annabel, 'what *will* become of us?'

'Just what would become of us here, I suppose; we should have to work—become teachers at a school, or governesses, or hospital nurses; only, as young women are not so plentiful in Australia as in England, why, we should be better paid.'

'Oh, but here we know so many people, and they would help us to find pleasant places to live in,' pleaded Annabel piteously. 'It does seem so dreadful to be ten thousand

miles away from your own country. I am sure we shall starve!'

'Don't be a goose, Annabel. How can we starve? First, we have the chance of making money and living in plenty, if not in refinement, on this estate that papa is going to buy. And if that does not turn out a success, we must find you a place as companion to the Governor-General's wife, or as nursery governess for *very* young children. I'll become a "school marm" at Yass—that's the name—and Rosamond will turn dressmaker, she has such a talent for a good fit.'

'Oh dear, oh dear! don't talk of such dreadful things. Are we to go all over the world only to become drudges and work-women? We may as well drown ourselves at once.'

'My child! my child!' said a gentle voice. 'What folly is this? What are we, that we should be absolved from the trials that others have to bear? God has chosen, for His own good purpose, to bring this misfortune upon us. He will give us strength to bear it in a chastened spirit. If we do not bear it in a resigned and chastened spirit, we are untrue to the teaching which we have all our lives affected to believe in. We have all our part to perform. Let us have no repining, my dearest Annabel. Our way is clear, and we have others to think of who require support.'

'But you *like* to be miserable, you know, mother; you think it is God's hand that afflicts you,' sobbed the despondING spoiled child. 'I can't feel that way. I haven't your faith. And it breaks my heart; I shall die, I shall die, I know.'

'Pray, my darling, pray for help and grace from on high,' continued the sweet, sad tones of the mother, as she drew her child's fair head upon her lap, and passed her hand amid 'the clustering ringlets rich and rare,' while Beatrice sat rather unsympathetically by. 'You will have me and your sisters to cheer you.' Here the fair disconsolate looked distrustfully at Beatrice.

By degrees the half-mesmeric, instinctive influence of the loved mother's pitying tones overcame the unwonted fit of unreason.

'I will try and be good,' she murmured, looking up with a soft light in her lovely eyes, 'but you know I am a poor creature at best. You must bear with me, and I will help as

much as I can, and try to keep from repining. But, oh, my home, my home, the dear old place where I was born. How dark and dreary do this long voyage and journey seem!'

'Have we not a yet longer voyage, a more distant journey to make, my own one?' whispered the mother, in accents soft as those with which in times gone by she had lulled the complaining babe. 'We know not the time, nor the hour. Think! If we do not prepare ourselves by prayer and faith, how dark *that* departure will appear!'

'You are always good and kind, always right, mother,' said the girl, recovering her composure and assuming a more steadfast air. 'Pray for me, that I may find strength; but do I not know that you pray for all of us incessantly? We ought—that is—I ought to be better than I am.'

Among the lesser trials which, at the time of his great sorrow, oppressed Howard Effingham, not the least was the necessity for parting with old servants and retainers. He was a man prone to become attached to attendants long used to his ways. Partly from kindly feeling, partly from indolence, he much disliked changing domestics or farm labourers. Accustomed to lean against a more readily available if not a stronger support than his own, he was, in most relations of life, more dependent than most men upon his confidential servants.

In this instance, therefore, he had taken it much to heart that his Scotch land-steward, a man of exceptional capacity and absolute personal fidelity, having a wife also, of rare excellence in her own department, should be torn from him by fate.

Backed up by his trusty Andrew, with his admirable wife, he felt as if he could have faced all ordinary colonial perils. While under Jeanie Cargill's care, his wife and daughters might have defied the ills of any climate, and risked the absence of the whole College of Physicians.

Andrew Cargill was one of those individuals of strongly marked idiosyncrasy, a majority of whom appear to have been placed, by some mysterious arrangement of nature, on the north side of the Tweed. Originally the under-gardener at The Chase, he had risen slowly but irresistibly through the gradations of upper-gardener and under-bailiff to the limited order of land-steward required by a moderate property. He had been a

newly-married man when he formed the resolution of testing the high wages of the Southron lairds. His family, as also his rate of wages, had increased. His expenses he had uniformly restricted, with the thoroughness of his economical forefathers. He despised all wasteful ways. He managed his master's affairs, as committed to his charge, with more than the rigorous exactitude he was wont to apply to his own. Gaining authority, by the steady pressure of unrelaxing forecast habit of life, he was permitted a certain license as to advice and implied rebuke. Had Andrew Cargill been permitted to exercise the same control over the extra-rural affairs that he was wont to use over the farm-servants and the plough-teams, the tenants and the trespassers, the crops and the orchards, the under-gardeners and the pineries, no failure, financial or otherwise, would have occurred at The Chase.

When the dread disaster could no longer be concealed, it is questionable whether Mr. Effingham felt anything more acutely than the necessity which existed of explaining to this faithful follower the extent, or worse, the cause of his misfortune. He anticipated the unbroken silence, the incredulous expression, with which all attempts at favourable explanation would be received. Open condemnation, of course, was out of the question. But the mute reproach or guarded reference to his master's inconceivable imbecility, which on this occasion might be more strongly accented than usual, would be hard to endure.

Mr. Effingham could not depute his wife, or one of the girls, to convey the information to the formidable Andrew. So he was fain to pull himself together one morning, and go forth to this uncompromising logician. Having briefly related the eventful tale, he concluded by dispensing with his faithful servant, as they were going to a new country, and very probably would never be able to employ servants again.

Having thrown down the bombshell, the 'lost leader' looked fixedly at Andrew's unmoved countenance, and awaited the particular kind of concentrated contempt which he doubted not would issue forth.

His astonishment was great when, after the hurried conclusion, 'I shall miss you, Andrew, you may be sure, more than I say; and as for Jeanie, I don't know how the young ladies and the mistress will get on without her,' the

following words issued slowly and oracularly from Andrew's lips:—

'Ye'll no miss me ava, Maister Effingham. Dinna ye think that it's a' news ye're tellin' me. I behoved just to speer a bit what garred the puir mistress look sae dowie and wae. And the upshot o' matters is that I'm gaun wi' ye.'

'And your wife and children?'

'Ye didna threep I was to leave them ahint? Andra' Cargill isna ane o' thae kind o' folk, sae just tak' heart, and for a' that's come and gane ye may lift up your heid ance mair; it's nae great things o' a heid, as the auld wife said o' the Deuk's, but if Botany Bay is the gra-and country they ca' it, and the book-writers and the agents haena been tellin' the maist unco-omon set o' lees, a' may gang weel yet.'

'But what's put this in *your* head, of all people in the world, Andrew?' queried his master, becoming bold, like individuals, or corporate bodies, of purely defensive ideas, after observing tokens of weakness in the besieging force.

'Weel, aweel, first and foremost, Laird, ye'll no say that we haena eaten your bread and saut this mony a year; there's been neither stint nor stay till't. I hae naething to say against the wage; aiblins a man weel instructed in his profession should aye be worthy o' his hire. Jeanie has been just spoiled by the mistress—my heart's sairvice to her and the young leddies—till ilka land they were no in, wad be strange eneugh to her, puir body. And the lang and short o' the hail matter is, that we loe ye and your bonnie lads and lassies, Laird, sae weel that we winna be pairted frae ye.'

As Mr. Effingham grasped the hand of the staunch, true servitor, who thus stood by him in his need, under whose gnarled bark of natural roughness lay hid so tender and true a core, the tears stood in his eyes.

'I shall never forget this, Andrew,' said he; 'you and Jeanie, old friend, will be the comfort of our lives in the land over-sea, and I cannot say what fresh courage your determination has given me. But are you sure it will be for your own advantage? You must have saved money, and might take a farm and live snugly here.'

'I was aboot to acquent ye, Laird,' said the conscientious Scot, too faithful to his religious principles to take credit for

a disinterestedness to which he felt but partially entitled. 'Ye'll see, Laird, for ye're weel acquent wi' the Word, that the battle's no always to the strong, nor the race to the swift. Ye'll ken that, frae your ain experience—aweel, I winna just say that neither'— proceeded Andrew, getting slightly involved between his quotations and his determination to be 'faithful' to his erring master, and by no means cloaking his sins of omission. 'I'll no say but what ye've been lettin' ither folks lead ye, and throw dust in ye're een in no the maist wiselike fashion, as nae doot ye wad hae dune wi' the tenants, puir bodies, gin I had letten ye. But touchin' my ain affairs, I haena sae muckle cause to brag; for maybe I was unco stiff-necked, and it behoved to chasten me, as weel's yersell; I hae tint—just flung awa'—my sma' scrapin's and savin's, these saxteen years and mair, in siccan a senseless daft-like way too!'

Here Andrew could not forbear a groan, which was echoed by an exclamation from his master.

'I am sincerely grieved—astonished beyond expression! Why, Andrew, surely *you* have not been dabbling in stocks and foreign loans?'

'Na—nae ga-amblin' for *me*, Laird!' replied Andrew sourly, and with an accentuation which implied speedy return to his ordinary critical state of mind; 'but if I had minded the Scripture, I wadna hae lost money and faith at one blow. "Strike not hands for a surety,"' it saith, 'but I trusted Geordie Ballantyne like a brither; my ain cousin, twice removed. He was aboot to be roupit oot, stock and lock, and him wi' a hoosefu' o' weans. I just gaed surety to him for three hunder pound!'

'You were never so mad—a prudent man like you?'

'And he just flitted to America, fled frae his ain land, his plighted word, and left me to bear the wyte o't. It's nae use greetin' ower spilt brose. The money's a' paid, and Andra' Cargill's as puir a man's when he cam' to The Chase, saxteen years last Michaelmas. Sae, between the heart-break it wad be to pairt wi' the family, and the sair heart I hae gotten at pairtin' wi' my siller, the loss o' a friend—"mine own familiar freend," as the Psawmist says—as weel's the earnings o' the maist feck o' my days, at ae blast, I hae settled to gang oot, Laird, to Austra-alia, and maybe

lay oot a wheen straight furrows for ye, as I did lang syne on the bonnie holms o' Ettrick.'

Here Andrew's voice faltered, and the momentous unprecedented conversation ended abruptly.

The unfeigned delight with which his wife and daughters received the news did much to reconcile Mr. Effingham to his expatriation, and even went far to persuade him that he had, in some way, originated the whole idea. Nor was their satisfaction unfounded. Andrew, with all his apparent sternness and occasional incivility, was shrewd, capable, and even versatile, in the application of his industry and unerring common sense to a wide range of occupations. He was the ideal colonist of his order, as certain to succeed in his own person as to be the most helpful and trustworthy of retainers.

As for Jeanie, she differed from her husband in almost every respect, except in the cardinal virtues. She had been a rustic celebrity in her youth, and Andrew occasionally referred still, in moments of unbending, to the difficulties of his courtship, and the victory gained over a host of rival suitors. She still retained the softness of manner and tenderness of nature which no doubt had originally led to the fascination of her masterful, rugged-natured husband.

For the rest, Jean Cargill had always been one of those servants, rare even in England, the land of peerless domestics, whose loving, unselfish service knew no abatement in sickness and in health, good fortune or evil hap. Her perceptive tastes and strong sense of propriety rendered her, as years rolled on, a trusted friend; an infinitely more suitable companion for the mistress and her children, as she always called them, than many a woman of higher culture. A tireless nurse in time of sickness; a brave, clear-headed, but withal modest and cautious, aid to the physician in the hour of peril. She had stood by the bedstead of more than one member of the family, in the dark hour, when the angel of death waited on the threshold of the chamber. Never had she slackened or faltered, by night or day, careless of food or repose till the crisis had passed, and the 'whisper of wings in the air' faded away.

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Mrs. Effingham, with all her maternal fondness and

devotion, had been physically unable at times to bear up against the fatigue of protracted watching and anxiety. She had more than once, from sheer bodily weakness, been compelled to abandon her post. But to Jeanie Cargill, sustained by matchless love and devotion, such a thing had never occurred. At noon or midnight, her hand was ever ready to offer the needful food, the vital draught; her ear ever watchful to catch the faint murmur of request; her eye, sleepless as a star, was ever undimmed, vigilant to detect the slightest change of symptom. Many nurses had been heard of, seen, and even read of, in the domestic circles of Reigate, but in the estimation of every matron capable of giving an opinion, Jeanie Cargill, by countless degrees of comparison, outshone them all.

That night, when Mrs. Effingham, as was her wont, sought relief from the burden of her daily cares, and the crowding anxieties of the morrow, 'meekly kneeling upon her knees,' it appeared to her as if in literal truth the wind had been tempered to the shorn lamb. That terrible travel into the unknown, the discomforts and dangers of the melancholy main, with the dreary waste of colonial life, would be quite different adventures, softened by the aid and companionship of everybody's 'dear old Jeanie.' Her patient industry, her helpful sympathy, her matchless loyalty and self-denial, would be well-springs of heaven-sent water in that desert. Andrew's company, though not socially exhilarating, was also an invigorating fact. Altogether, Mrs. Effingham's spirits improved, and her hopes arose freshly strengthened.

No sooner was it settled that Andrew and his fortunes were to be wafted o'er the main, in the vessel which bore the Effingham family, than, with characteristic energy, he had constituted himself Grand Vizier and responsible adviser. He definitely approved of much that had been done, and counselled still further additions to the outfit. Prime and invincible was his objection to leave behind a certain pet 'Jersey coo,' 'a maist extraordinar' milker, and for butter, juist unco-omon. If she could be ta'en oot to thae parts, she wad be a sma' fortune—that is, in ony Christian land where butter and cheese were used. Maybe the sea-captain wad let her gang for the value o' her milk; she was juist in the height o't the noo. It wad be a sin and a

shame to let her be roupit for half price, like the ither kye, puir things.'

Persistent advocacy secured his point. Daisy had been morally abandoned to her fate; but Wilfred, goaded by Andrew's appeals, had an interview with the shipping clerk, and arranged that Daisy, if approved of, should fill the place of the proverbial milch cow, so invariably bracketed with the 'experienced surgeon' in the advertisements of the Commercial Marine. Her calf also, being old enough to eat hay, was permitted to accompany her.

Andrew also combated the idea that the greyhounds, or at least a pair, should be left behind, still less the guns or fishing-rods.

'Wasna the Laird the best judge of a dog in the haill country-side, and no that far frae the best shot? What for suld he walk aboot the woods in Australia waesome and disjaskit like, when there might be kangaroos, or whatna kind o' ootlandish game, to be had for the killing? Hoot, hoot, puir Page and Damsel couldna be left ahint, nor the wee terrier Vennie.'

There was more trouble with the greyhounds' passage than the cows, but in consideration of the large amount of freight and passage-money paid by the family, the aristocratic long-tails were franked. Andrew, with his own hands, packed up the fowling-pieces and fishing-rods, which, with the exaggerated prudence of youth, Wilfred had been minded to leave behind, considering nothing worthy of removal that would not be likely to add to their material gains in the 'new settlement.' He had yet to learn that recreation can never be advantageously disregarded, whether the community be a young or an old one.

Little by little, a chain of slow yet subtle advances, by which, equally with geologic alterations of the earth's surface, its ephemeral living tenants proceed or retrograde, effected the translation of Howard Effingham, with wife and children, retainers and household goods. Averse by nature to all exertion which savoured of detail, reserving his energy for what he was pleased to dignify with the title of great occasions, as he looked back over the series of multitudinous necessary arrangements, Howard Effingham wondered, in his secret soul, at the transference of his household. Left to him-

self, he was candid enough to admit, such a result could never have been achieved. But the ceaseless ministration of Jeanie and Andrew, the calm forethought of Mrs. Effingham, the unsparing personal labour of Wilfred, had, in due time, worked the miracle.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST CAMP

WHATEVER may be the loss or injury inseparable from misfortune, no one of experience denies that the pain is lightened when the blow has fallen. The shuddering terror, the harrowing doubts, which precede an operation, far outrun the torture of the knife. Worse a thousandfold to endure than actual misery, poverty and disgrace, is the dull sense of impending doom, the daily anxiety, the secret dread, the formless, unhasting, unsparing terror, which each day brings nearer to the victim.

Howard Effingham had, for weeks past, suffered the torments of the lost. An unwise concealment of the coming ruin which his reserved temperament forbade him to announce, had stretched him upon the rack. The acute agony was now past, and he felt unspeakably relieved as, with increasing completeness, the preparations for departure were accomplished.

After the shock of the disaster he commenced the necessary duties with an unwontedly tranquil mind. He had despatched a bank draft for the amount mentioned by his friend and counsellor the Rev. Harley Sternworth. Prior to this needful act, he held various conferences with the trustees of Mrs. Effingham's settlement. In many instances such authorities are difficult, even impracticable, to deal with, preferring the minimum interest which can be safely procured in the matter of trust money, to the slightest risk. In this instance, the arbiter of destiny was an old gentleman, at once prudent yet liberal-minded, who did not disdain to examine the arguments in favour of the Australian plan. After reading Mr. Stern-

worth's letter, and comparing the facts therein stated with colonial securities, to which he had access, he gave in his adhesion to the investment, and converted his coadjutor, a mild, obstinate personage, who could with difficulty be induced to see any other investment legally open to them but the 'sweet simplicity of the three per cents.'

Long was the last day in coming, but it came at last. Their stay in the old home was protracted until only time was given for the journey to Southampton, where the staunch, old-fashioned wool-ship lay, which was to receive their condensed personal effects and, as it seemed to them, shrivelled-up personalities.

Adieus were said, some with sore weeping and many tears; some with moderate but sincere regret; some with the half-veiled indifference with which any action not affecting their own comfort, interest, or reputation is regarded by a large class of acquaintances. The minor possessions—the carriages, the horses, the library, the furniture—were sold. A selection of the plainest articles of this last requisite, which, the freight being wonderfully low, their chief adviser had counselled them to carry with them, was alone retained.

'It will sell for next to nothing,' his last letter had said, 'judging from my experience after the regiment had "got the route," and you will have it landed here for less than the price of very ordinary substitutes. Bring all the small matters you can, that may be useful; and don't leave the piano behind. I must have a tune when I come to see you at Warbrok, and hear Mrs. Effingham sing "Auld Robin Gray" again. You recollect how our old Colonel broke down, with tears rolling over his wrinkled cheeks, when she sang it?'

All was now over. The terrible wrench had been endured, tearing apart those living fibres which in early life are entwined around hearth and home. They had gazed in mournful farewell upon each familiar thing which from childhood's hour had seemed a portion of their sheltered life. Like plants and flowerets, no denizens of hothouse or simulated tropic clime, but not the less carefully tended from harmful extremes, climatic or social, had the Effingham family grown and flourished. Now they were about to be abandoned to the elemental forces. Who should say whether they would wither under rude blasts and a fiercer sun, or, from natural

vigour and inherent vitality, burgeon and bloom beneath the Southern heavens?

Of the whole party, she who showed less outward token of sorrow, felt in her heart the most unresting anguish. To a woman like Mrs. Effingham, reared from infancy in the exclusive tenets of English county life, the idea of so comprehensive a change, of a semi-barbarous migration, had been well-nigh more bitter than death—but for one source of aid and spiritual support, unendurable.

Her reliance had a twofold foundation. The undoubting faith in a Supreme Being, who ordered aright all the ways of His creatures, even when apparently remote from happiness, remained unshaken. Firmly had she ever trusted in that God by whom her former life had been guided. Events might take a mysteriously doubtful course. But, in the wilderness, under leafy forest-arches, beneath the shadow of the gathering tempest, on land or ocean, she would trust in God and her Redeemer. Steadfast and brave of mien, though with trembling lip and sickened heart, she marshalled her little troop and led them on board the stout ship, which only awaited the morrow's dawn to spread her wings and sweep southward—ever southward—amid unknown seas, until the great island continent should arise from out the sky-line, telling of a land which was to provide them with a home, with friends, even perhaps a fortune. What a mockery in that hour of utter wretchedness did such hope promptings appear!

After protracted mental conflict, no more perfect system of rest can be devised than that afforded by a sea-voyage. Anxiety, however mordant, must be lulled to rest under the fixed conditions of a journey, before the termination of which no battle of life can be commenced, no campaign resumed.

Toil and strife, privation and poverty, labour and luck, all the contending forces of life are hushed as in a trance. As in hibernation, the physical and mental attributes appear to rally, to recruit fresh stores of energy. 'The dead past buries its dead'—sorrowfully perchance, and with silent weeping. But the clouds which have gathered around the spirit disperse and flee heavenwards, as from a snow-robed Alp at morning light. Then the roseate hues of dawn steal slowly o'er the silver-pure peaks and glaciers. The sun gilds anew the dark pine forest, the purple hills. Once more hope springs forth

ardent and unfettered. Endeavour presses onward to victory or to death.

To the Effingham family came a natural surprise, that, under their circumstances of exile and misfortune, any cheerfulness could occur. The parents possessed an air of decent resignation. But the younger members of the family, after the first days of unalloyed wretchedness, commenced to exhibit the elastic temperament of youth.

The seamanship displayed on the staunch sailing ship commenced to interest them. The changing aspects of sea and sky, the still noon, the gathering storm-cloud, the starry midnight, the phosphorescent fire-trail following the night-path of their bark—all these had power to move the sad hearts of the exiles. And, in youth, to move the heart is to lighten the spirit.

Wilfred Effingham, true to his determination to deliver himself over to every practical duty which might grow out of their life, had procured books professing to give information with regard to all the Australian colonies.

With difficulty he managed, after an extended literary tour involving Tasmania, Swan River, and New Zealand, to distinguish the colony to which they were bound, though he failed to gather precise information regarding the district in which their land was situated. He made out that the climate was mild, and favourable to the Anglo-Saxon constitution; that in mid-winter, flowering shrubs and delicate plants bloomed in spite of the pretended rigour of the season; that the heat in summer was considerable, as far as shown by the reading of the thermometer, but that from the extreme dryness of atmosphere no greater oppressiveness followed than in apparently cooler days in other climates.

'Here, mother,' he said, having mastered the latter fact, 'we have been unconsciously coming to the exact country suited to your health and pursuits. You know how fond of flowers you are. Well, you can have a winter garden now, without the expense of glass or the trouble of hothouse flues; while you can cheat the season by abstaining from colds, which you could never do in England, you know.'

'I shall be happy to have a little garden of my own, my son,' she replied, 'but who is to work in it? We have done for ever, I suppose, with head and under gardeners. You and Guy and everybody will always, I suppose, be at farm-work,

or herding cattle and sheep, busy from morning to dark. How glad we shall be to see your faces at night!'

'It does not follow,' replied Wilfred, 'that we shall never have a moment to spare. Listen to what this author says: "The colonist who has previously been accustomed to lead a life, where intervals of leisure and intellectual recreation hold an acknowledged place, must not consider that, in choosing Australia for his home, he has forfeited all right to such indulgences. Let him not think that he has pledged himself to a life of unbroken toil and unremitting manual labour. On the contrary, he will discover that the avocations of an Australian country gentleman chiefly demand the exercise of ordinary prudence and of those rudimentary business habits which are easily acquired. Intelligent supervision, rather than manual labour, is the special qualification for colonial success; and we do not err in saying that by its exercise more fortunes have been made than by the rude toils which are supposed to be indispensable in the life of an Australian settler."

'There, mother!' said the ardent adventurer. 'That writer is a very sensible fellow. He knows what he is talking about, for he has been ever so many years in Australia, and has been over every part of it.'

'Well, there certainly seems permission given to us to have a flower-garden for mamma without ruining ourselves or neglecting our business,' said Rosamond. 'And if the climate is so beautiful as they say, these dreadful February neuralgia-martyrdoms will be things of the past with you, dearest old lady.'

'There, mother, what do you say to that? Why, you will grow so young and beautiful that you will be taken for our elder sister, and papa would be ashamed to say you are his wife, only that old gentlemen generally marry young girls nowadays. Then, fancy what a garden we shall have at The Chase—we *must* call it The Chase, no matter what its present name is. It wouldn't feel natural for us to live anywhere but at a Chase. It would be like changing our name.'

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On board ship there is always abundant leisure for talk and recreation, especially in low latitudes and half calms. The Effinghams, after they had been a month out, began to feel

sensibly the cheering effects of total change of scene—the life-breathing atmosphere of the unbounded sea. The demons of Regret and Fear, for the most part, shun the blue wave and lie in wait on land for unwary mortals. The ship was seaworthy and spacious, the officers capable, the few passengers passably agreeable. Gradually the tone was restored of Captain Effingham's nervous system. He ceased to repine and regret. He even beheld some grains of hope in the future, black as the outlook had until now appeared. While the expression of sweet serenity and calm resignation which ever dwelt upon the features of Mrs. Effingham became heightened and assured under the concomitants of the voyage, until she appeared to radiate peace and goodwill sufficient to affect beneficially the whole ship's company. As for the two little ones, Selden and Blanche, they appeared to have been accustomed since infancy to a seafaring life. They ran about unchecked, and were in everybody's way and every one's affections. They were the youngest children on board, and many a rough sailor turned to look, with something like a glistening in his eye, on the saucy brown-eyed boy, and the delicate little five-year-old fairy, whose masses of fair hair floated in the breeze, or were temporarily confined with an unwilling ribbon.

It seemed but the lengthening limit of a dream when the seaman at the good ship's bow was commanded to keep a look-out for land; when, yet another bright blue day, fading into eve, and a low coast-line is seen, rising like an evening cloud from out a summer sea.

'Hurrah!' said Wilfred Effingham, as the second mate pointed out the land of promise, 'now our life begins. We shall belong to ourselves again, instead of being the indulgently treated slaves—very well treated, I confess—but still the unquestionable bond-slaves of that enlightened taskmaster, Captain Henry Fleetby of the *Marlshire*.'

'We have been very happy, my dear,' said Mrs. Effingham, 'happier than I should have thought possible in a ship, under any circumstances. Let us hope our good fortune will continue on land. I shall always look back to this voyage as the most wonderful rest that our poor wounded hearts could have enjoyed. Your papa looks quite himself again, and I feel better than I have done for years. I shall remember our

captain, his officers, and his ship, with gratitude, as long as I live.'

'I feel quite attached to the dear old vessel,' said Annabel, 'but we can't go sailing about the world all our lives, like respectable Flying Dutchmen. I suppose the captain must turn us out to-morrow. Who would have thought we should regret coming to the end of the voyage?'

How calm was that last day of the long, but not too long, voyage, when they glided for hours on a waveless sea, by a great wall of sandstone cliffs, which finally opened, as if by magic, and discovered the portal of an Enchanted Haven! Surely the prospect could not all be real, of this wondrous nook, stolen from the vast, the limitless Pacific, in which they discerned, through the empurpling eve, villas, cottages, mansions, churches, white-walled and fantastic to their eyes, girt with strange shrubs and stately forest trees of unknown aspect. As the *Marlshire* floated to her anchorage, threading a fleet of skiffs, which made the waters gay with many a sail, the full heart of the mother and the wife overflowed.

Involuntarily a fervent prayer of thanksgiving went up to that Being who had safely guarded them o'er the waste of ocean; had permitted their entrance into this good land, which lay ready to receive them in their need.

Passengers concluding a short voyage are nervously anxious to land, and commence the frantic enjoyment of existence on *terra firma*. Not so with the denizens of the good ship *Marlshire*, which had been their home and dwelling-place for more than a quarter of a year. Having grown, with the strange adaptiveness of our nature, to love the gallant bark, you revere the captain, respect the first officer, and believe in the second. Even the crew is above the average of the mercantile Jack-tar novel. You will always swear by the old tub; and you will not go on shore till to-morrow morning, if then.

All things considered, the family decided to stay quietly on board the *Marlshire* that night, so as to disembark in a leisurely way in the morning, when they would have the day before them in which to make arrangements.

They talked of staying quietly on board, but the excitement of being so near the land was too much for them. The

unnatural quietude of the ship, the calm water of the bay, the glancing lights, which denoted the thousand homes of the city, the cries and sounds of the massed population of a seaport, the warm midnight air, the woods and white beaches which denoted the shore-line, the gliding harbour-boats, all seemed to sound in one strangely distinct chorus: 'Land, land, land at last.' All magically exciting, these sounds and scenes forbade sleep. Long after the other members of the family had gone below for the night, Wilfred and Rosamond paced the deck, eagerly discussing plans for the future, and, with the sanguine temper of youth, rapidly following each freshly-formed track to fortune.

No one was likely to indulge in slumber after sunrise. A babel of sounds announced that the unlading of cargo had commenced. Their last ship breakfast prefaced the actual stepping upon the friendly gangway, which now alone divided them from the other side of the world. Before that feat was performed, a squarely-built, grey-headed personage, in clerical garb, but withal of a somewhat secular manner, walked rapidly from the wharf to the deck and confronted the party.

'Here you are at last, all safe and sound, Howard, my dear fellow!' said he, shaking hands warmly with Mr. Effingham. 'Not so much changed either; too easy-going for that. Pray present me to Mrs. Effingham and the young ladies. Your eldest son looking after the luggage?—proper place for him. Allow me to take your arm, my dear madam, and to conduct you to the hotel, where I have engaged rooms for you. May as well set off—talk as we go along. Only heard of the *Marlshire* being signalled the day before yesterday. Came a long journey—slightly knocked up this morning, but soon recovered—splendid climate—make a young man of you, Earl Percy, in a year or two. We always called him Earl Percy in the regiment, Mrs. Effingham. Perhaps he told you. And all this fine family too—two, four, six, seven. I can hardly credit my senses. Plenty of room for them in this country—plenty of room—that's one thing.'

'We have every reason to be thankful for the comfortable way in which we have voyaged here,' said Mrs. Effingham; 'and now that you have so kindly come to meet us, I feel as if half our troubles were over.'

'Your troubles are just commencing, my dear madam, but with Harley Sternworth's help something may be done to lighten them. Still I feel sure that these young ladies will look upon difficulties in a sensible way, not expecting too much, or being discouraged—just at first, you know.'

'Your country, my old friend, will have to look bad indeed if my wife cannot find a good word to say for it,' said Mr. Effingham, roused to unwonted cheerfulness. 'At any rate, it suits you well; you look as hard as a west country drover.'

'Never was better. Haven't had a dose of medicine for years. Ride fifty miles a day if necessary. Finest climate—finest country—under the sun. Lots of parish work and travelling, with a dash of botanising, and a pinch of geology to fill up spare time. Wouldn't go back and live in a country town for the world. Mope to death.'

All this time the reverend gentleman was pressing forward up a gentle incline, towards the lower end of George Street, and after walking up that noble thoroughfare, and discreetly refraining from mention of the buildings which ornament that part of it, he turned again towards the water and piloted his party successfully to Batty's Hotel.

'Here, my dear madam, you will find that I have secured you pleasant apartments for a week or ten days, during which time you will be able to recruit after the voyage, and do justice to the beauties of the city. You are not going up country at once. A few days' leisure will be economy in the end.'

'So we are not to start off hundreds of miles at once, in a bullock dray, as the captain told us?' said Rosamond.

'No, my dear young lady, neither now nor, I hope, at any time will such a mode of travelling be necessary. I cannot say too much for your conveyance, but it will be fairly comfortable and take you to your destination safely. After that will commence what you will doubtless consider to be a tolerably rough life. Yes—a rough life.'

'These young people have made up their minds to anything short of living like Esquimaux,' said Mr. Effingham. 'I don't think you will frighten them. You and I saw curious backwoods places when we were quartered in Canada, didn't we? You will hardly match them in Australia.'

'Nothing to be compared to it,' said Mr. Sternworth earnestly. 'We have no winter here, to begin with; that is, none worth speaking about for cold. Moreover, the people are intensely British in their manners and customs, in an old-fashioned way. But I am not going to explain everything. You will have to *live* the explanation, which is far better than hearing it, and is sure to be retained by the memory.'

It was decided that no move was to be made for the interior until the baggage was landed, and arrangements made for its safe carriage by dray.

'If you leave before all is ready,' said their mentor, 'you run risk of the loss of a portion, by mistake or negligence; and this loss may never be repaired. You will find your furniture of immense value in the new abode, and will congratulate yourself upon having brought it. It is astonishing with what different eyes you look upon a table or sideboard here and in England.'

'I was anxious to bring out some of our old possessions,' said Mrs. Effingham. 'But I had hard work to persuade my husband that we might not be able to procure such here. Your advice was most opportune. I feel more pleased than I can say that we were able to act upon it.'

At lunch they were joined by Wilfred, who had discovered that there was no chance of all the furniture coming ashore that day. He had arranged with the captain that Andrew and his family should remain on board, as also Daisy the cow, until everything was ready to load the drays with the heavy baggage.

Andrew had expressed himself much pleased with the arrangement, regarding the ship as 'mair hamelike' than the busy foreign-looking city, to the inhabitants of which he did not take kindly, particularly after an exploring stroll, which happened to be on the Sunday after arrival.

'A maist freevolous folk, given up to mammon-worship and pleesure-huntin',—walkin' in thae gairdens—no that they're no just by-ordinar' for shrubs and floorin' plants frae a' lands—walkin' and haverin' in the gairdens on the Sawbath day, a' smilin' and heedless, just on the vairge o' happiness. Saw ye ever the like? It's juist fearsome.'

Upon the lady portion of the family, the city with its

shops, parks, and inhabitants made a more favourable impression.

Mr. Sternworth was untiring in showing them, in the excursions which Mrs. Effingham and the girls made under his guidance, the beauties of the city. They wandered much in the lovely public gardens, to Mrs. Effingham's intense delight, whose love of flowers was, perhaps, her strongest taste. They drove out on the South Head road, and duly noted the white-walled mansions, plunged deeply in such luxuriant flower-growth as the Northern strangers had rarely yet beheld. Wonderfully gracious seemed the weather. It was the Australian spring with air as soft and balmy as that of Italy in her fairest hours.

How enjoyable was that halt between two stages of existence! Daily, as they rose from the morning meal, they devoted themselves to fresh rambles around the city, under the chaperonage of the worthy person. They commenced to feel an involuntary exhilaration. The pure air, the bright days, the glowing sun, the pleasant sea-breeze, combined to cause an indefinable conviction that they had found a region formed for aid and consolation.

The streets, the equipages, the people, presented, it is true, few of the contrasts, to their English experience, which a foreign town would have afforded. Yet was there the excitement, strong and vivid, which arises from the first sight of a strange land and an unfamiliar people.

'This town has a great look of Marseilles,' said Wilfred, as they loitered, pleasantly fatigued, towards their temporary home in the deepening twilight. 'The same white, balconied, terraced houses of pale freestone; the southern climate, the same polyglot water-side population, only the Marseilles quay might be stowed away in a hundred corners of this wonderful harbour; and the people—only look at them—have a Parisian tendency to spend their evenings in the streets. I suppose the mildness of the climate tends to it.'

'This kind of thing, I suppose, strikes you sharply at first,' said Mr. Sternworth; 'but my eyes have become so accustomed to all the aspects of my little world, that I cannot see much difference between it and many English places I have known in my day. The variations noted at first have long since disappeared, and I feel as much at home as I used

to do at Bideford, when I was quartered there with the old regiment.'

'But surely the people must be different from what they are in England,' said Beatrice. 'The country is different, the trees, the plants—how beautiful many of them are!—and the climate; surely all this must tend to alter the character or the appearance of the people.'

'It may in a few centuries have that effect, my dear young lady,' said the old gentleman, 'but such changes are after the fashion of nature's workings, imperceptibly slow. You will agree with me in another year, that many old acquaintances in men and manners are to be met with out here, and the rest present only outward points of divergence.'

The days of restful peace had passed. The valuable freight—to them invaluable—having been safely loaded, Mr. Sternworth unfolded the plan which he had arranged for their journey.

'You are aware,' he said, 'that Warbrok Chase, as the young ladies have decided to call your estate, is more than 200 miles from Sydney. It lies 40 miles beyond Yass, which town is distant 180 miles from the Metropolis. Now, although we shall have railways in good time, there is nothing of the sort yet, and the roads are chiefly in their natural state. I would therefore suggest that you should travel in a roomy horse-waggon, comfortably fitted up, taking a tent with you in which to sleep at night. I have procured a driver well acquainted with the country, who knows all the camps and stopping-places, and may be depended upon to take you safely to your journey's end.'

'No railways, no coaches,' said Mr. Effingham; 'yours is rather a primitive country, Harley, it must be confessed; but you know what is best for us all, and the weather is so mild that none of us can suffer from the bivouac.'

'I should not have hazarded it if there had been any risk to health,' said the old gentleman, bowing courteously. 'There are coaches, however, and you might reach your destination in four days, after hurried travelling. But the tariff is expensive for so large a party; you would be crowded, or meet unsuitable fellow-travellers, while you could take but little of your luggage with you.'

'I vote for the overland journey,' said Rosamond. 'I am

sure it will be quite refreshingly eastern. I suppose Andrew and Jeanie and poor dear Daisy and the dogs and everything can go.'

'Everything and everybody you please but the heavy luggage. Your servants will be able to sleep under a part of the waggon-tilt, which will be comfortable enough at night. The cow will give you milk for your tea. Even the greyhounds may catch you a wallaby or two, which will come in for soup.'

'There could not be a better scheme,' said Wilfred exultingly. 'My dear sir, you are a second father to us. How long do you think it will take us to get to Warbrok altogether?'

'You will have to make up your minds to ten or twelve days' travelling, I am afraid—say, twenty miles a day. I really believe you will not find it tedious, but, as with your water journey, get quite to like it. Besides, there is one grand advantage, as far as the young ladies are concerned.'

'What is that?' said Annabel, with added interest, but somewhat doleful countenance. 'Is there *any* advantage in travelling like gipsies?'

'It is this, then, my dear girls,' said the old man, bending upon them his clear, kindly beaming eyes, 'that you will make acquaintance with the rougher habitudes (and yet not unduly so) of country life in Australia by this primitive forest journeying. When you arrive at your destination you will therefore be proportionately satisfied with your new residence, because it will represent *a settled home.* Your daily journey will by that time have become a task, so that you will hail the prospect of repose with thankfulness.'

'Is that all?' asked Annabel with a disappointed air. 'Then we are to undergo something dreadful, in order that something only disagreeable may not look so bad after it. Is all Australian life like that? But I daresay I shall die young, and so it won't matter much. Is the lunch nearly ready? I declare I am famishing.'

Every one laughed at this characteristic sequence to Annabel's prophecy, and the matter of the march having been settled, their friend promised to send up the waggon-driver next morning, in order that the proper fittings and the lamps —indispensable articles—and luggage might be arranged

and packed. A tent also was purchased, and bedding, cooking utensils, provisions, etc., secured.

'You will find Dick Evans an original character,' said the parson, 'but I do not know any man in the district so well suited for this particular service. He has been twenty years in Australia, and knows everything, both good and evil, that can be known of the country and people. He is an old soldier, and in the 50th Regiment saw plenty of service. He has his faults, but they don't appear on the surface, and I know him well enough to guarantee that you will be wholly ignorant of them. His manners—with a dash of soldier servant—are not to be surpassed.'

At an hour next morning so soon after dawn that Andrew Cargill, the most incorruptible of early birds, was nearly caught napping, Mr. Dick Evans arrived with two horses and his waggon. The rest of the team, not being wanted, he had left in their paddock at Homebush. He immediately placed the waggon in the most convenient position for general reference, took out his horses, which he accommodated with nose-bags, and with an air of almost suspicious deference inquired of Andrew what he could commence to do in the way of packing.

The two men, as if foreseeing that possible encounters might henceforth take place between them, looked keenly at each other. Richard Evans had the erect bearing of which the recipient of early drill can rarely divest himself. His wiry figure but slightly above the middle height, his clean-shaved, ruddy cheek, his keen grey eye, hardly denoted the fifty years and more which he carried so lightly.

A faultless constitution, an open-air occupation with habits of great bodily activity, had borne him scatheless through a life of hardship and risk.

This personage commenced with a request to be shown the whole of the articles intended to be taken, gently but firmly withstanding any opinion of Andrew's to the contrary, and replying to his protests with the mild superiority of the attendant in a lunatic asylum. After the whole of the light luggage had been displayed, he addressed himself to the task of loading and securing it with so much economy of space and advantage of position, that Andrew readily yielded to him the right to such leadership in future.

'Nae doot,' he said, 'the auld graceless sworder that he is, has had muckle experience in guiding his team through thae pathless wildernesses, and it behoves a wise man to "jouk and let the jaw gae by." But wae's me, it's dwelling i' the tents o' Kedar!'

Dick Evans, who was a man of few words and strong in the heat of argument, was by no means given to mixing up discussion with work. He therefore kept on steadily with his packing until evening, only requiring from Andrew such help and information as were indispensable.

'There,' said he, as he removed the low-crowned straw hat from his heated brow, and prepared to fill his pipe, 'I think that will about do. The ladies can sit there in the middle, where I've put the tent loose, and use it as a sofy, if they've a mind to. I can pitch it in five minutes at night, and they can sleep in it as snug as if they had a cottage with them. You and your wife can have the body of the waggon to yourselves at night, and I'll sleep under the shafts. The captain and the young gentlemen can have all the room between the wheels, and nobody can want more than that. I suppose your missis can do what cooking's wanted?'

'Nae doot,' Andrew replied with dignity, 'Mistress Cargill wad provide a few bits o' plain victual. A wheen parritch, a thocht brose, wad serve a' hands better than flesh meat, and tea or coffee, or siccan trash.'

'Porridge won't do for me,' said the veteran firmly, 'not if I know it. Oatmeal's right enough for you Scotchmen, and not bad stuff either, *in your own country*, but beef and mutton's our tack in Australia.'

'And will ye find a flesher in this "bush," as they ca' it, that we've to push through?' demanded Andrew. 'Wad it no be mair wiselike to keep to victual that we can carry in our sacks?'

'Get plenty of beef and mutton and everything else on the road,' said Mr. Evans, lighting his pipe and declining further argument. 'Don't you forget to bring a frying-pan. I'll take the horses back to the paddock now and be here by daylight, so as we can make a good start.'

It had been arranged by Mr. Sternworth that the boys, as he called them, should set forth in the morning with Evans

and the waggon, as also Andrew and Jeanie, taking with them the cow, the dogs, and the smaller matters which the family had brought. No necessity for Captain Effingham and the ladies to leave Sydney until the second day. He would drive them in a hired carriage as far as the first camp. which Evans had described to him.

They would thus avoid the two days' travel, and commence their journey after the expedition had performed its trial trip, so to speak.

'What *should* we have done without your kind care of us?' said Mrs. Effingham. 'Everything up to this time has been a pleasure trip. When is the hard life that we heard so much of to begin?'

'Perhaps,' said Rosamond, 'Mr. Sternworth is going to be like the brigand in the romances, who used to lure persons from their homes. I have no doubt but that there are "hard times" awaiting us somewhere or somehow.'

'My dear young lady, let me compliment you on your good sense in taking that view of the future. It will save you from disappointment, and fill your mind with a wholesome strength to resist adversity. You may need all your philosophy, and I counsel you to keep it, like armour, well burnished. I do not know of any evil likely to befall you, but that you will have trouble and toil may be taken as certain. Only, after a time, I predict that you will overcome your difficulties, and find yourselves permanently benefited.'

The old gentleman, whose arrangements were as successfully carried out as if he had been the commissary instead of the chaplain of his former regiment, made his appearance on the following day in a neat barouche drawn by a pair of good-looking bay horses, and driven by a highly presentable coachman.

'Why, it might pass muster for a private carriage,' said Annabel. 'And I can see a crest on the panels. I suppose we shall never own a carriage again as long as we live.'

'This *is* a private carriage, or rather was, once upon a time,' said Mr. Sternworth; 'the horses and the coachman belonged to it. Many carriages were put down last year, owing to a scarcity of money, and my old friend Watkins here, having saved his wages, like a prudent man, bought his

master's carriage and horses, and commenced as cab proprietor. He has a large connection among his former master's friends, and is much in demand at balls and other festivities.'

The ex-coachman drove them at a lively pace, but steadily, along a macadamised turnpike road, not so very different from a country lane in Surrey, though wider, and not confined by hedges. The day was fine. On either side, after the town was left behind, were large enclosures, wherein grazed sheep, cattle, and horses. Sometimes they passed an orangery, and the girls were charmed with the rows of dark green trees, upon which the golden fruit was ripe. Then an old-fashioned house, in an orchard, surrounded by a wall—wall and house coloured red, and rusty with the stains of age—much like a farmhouse in Hertfordshire. One town they passed was so manifestly old-fashioned, having even *ruins*, to their delight and astonishment, that they could hardly believe they were in a new country.

'Some one has been playing Rip Van Winkle tricks upon us,' said Rosamond. 'We have been asleep a hundred years, and are come back finding all things grown old and in decay.'

'You must not forget that the colony has been established nearly fifty years,' said Mr. Sternworth, 'and that these are some of the earliest settlements. They were not always placed in the most judicious sites; wherefore, as newer towns have passed them in the race for trade, these have submitted to become, as you see them, "grey with the rime of years," and simulating decay as well as circumstances will permit.'

'Well, I think much more highly of Australia, now that I have seen a *real* ruin or two,' said Annabel decisively. 'I always pictured the country full of hideous houses of boards, painted white, with spinach green doors and windows.'

The afternoon was well advanced as the inmates of the carriage descried the encampment which Mr. Evans had ordered, with some assistance from his military experience. So complete in all arrangements for comfort was it—not wholly disregarding the element of romantic scenery—that the girls cried aloud in admiration.

The streamlet (or creek) which afforded the needful water

meandered round the base of a crag, jutting out from a forest-clothed hill. The water-hole (or basin) in the channel of the creek was larger than such generally are, and reflected brightly the rays of the declining sun. The meadow, which afforded space for the encampment, was green, and fertile of appearance. The waggon stood near the water; the four horses were peacefully grazing. At a short distance, under a spreading tree, the tent had been pitched, while before it was a wood fire, upon which Jeanie was cooking something appetising. Wilfred and his brother were strolling, gun in hand, up the creek; the cow was feeding among the rushes with great contentment; Andrew was seated, meditating, upon a box which he had brought forth from the recesses of the waggon; while Dick Evans, not far from a small fire, upon which stood a camp-kettle at boiling-point, was smoking with an air of conscious pride, as if not only the picturesque beauty, but the personages pertaining to the landscape, belonged to him individually.

'I could not leave you more comfortably provided for,' said their 'guide, philosopher, and friend.' 'Old Dick may be trusted in all such matters as implicitly as the Duke of Wellington. I never knew him at fault yet in this kind of life.'

'You must positively stay and have afternoon tea with us,' exclaimed Annabel. 'It is exactly five, and there is Dick putting a tin cupful of tea into the teapot. What extravagant people you colonists are! I never drank tea in the open air before, but it seems quite the right thing to do. I see Jeanie has made griddle-cakes, like a dear old thing. And I know there is butter. I am so hungry. You *will* stay, won't you?'

'I think, sir,' said the ex-family coachman, looking indulgently at the special pleader, 'that we shall have time to get back to the Red Cow Inn to-night, after a cup of tea, as the young lady wishes it. I'll run you into town bright and early to-morrow.'

'Very well then, Miss Annabel, I shall have the honour to accept your invitation,' bowed the old man. 'I go away more cheerfully than I expected, now that I leave you all so comparatively snug. It will not be for long. Be sure that I shall meet you on the threshold of Warbrok.'

The *al fresco* meal was partaken of with much relish, even gaiety, after which civilisation—as personified by the reverend gentleman and the carriage—departed. Annabel looked after it ruefully, while Jeanie and Mrs. Effingham took counsel together for the night. It was for the first time in the family history. Never before had the Effinghams slept, so to speak, in the open air. It was a novel adventure in their uneventful lives—a marked commencement of their colonial career. It affected them differently, according to their idiosyncrasies. Rosamond was calmly resolute, Annabel apprehensive, and Beatrice indifferent; the boys in high spirits; Mr. Effingham half in disapproval, despondently self-accusing; while Mrs. Effingham and Jeanie were so fully absorbed in the great bedding question that they had no emotions to spare for any abstract consideration whatever.

The moon, in her second quarter, had arisen lustrous in the pure, dark blue firmament, fire-besprinkled with 'patines of bright gold,' before this important matter (and supper) was concluded. Then it was formally announced that the tent was fully furnished, and had turned out wonderfully commodious. The mattresses were placed upon a layer of 'bush-feathers,' as Dick Evans called them, and which (the small twigs and leaf-shoots of the eucalyptus) he had impressed Wilfred and his brother to gather. There was a lantern secured to the tent-pole, which lighted up the apartment; and sheets, blankets, coverlets being brought forth, Annabel declared that she was sure they would all sleep like tops, that for her part she must insist on going to bed at once as the keen air had made her quite drowsy. A dressing-table had been improvised, chiefly with the aid of Mr. Evans' mechanical skill. When the matron and her daughters made their farewell for the night, and closed their canvas portal, every one was of the opinion that a high degree of comfort and effective lodging had been reached.

Mr. and Mrs. Cargill and family retired to the inmost recesses of the upper waggon, where the ends of the tilt, fastened together, protected them. Mr. Effingham and his sons joined Dick Evans at his briskly burning fire, where the old man was smoking and occasionally indulging in a refresher of tea as if he had no intention of going to bed till he reached Warbrok.

'We are having glorious weather to travel in, Evans,' said Mr. Effingham. 'You have been in the service, Mr. Sternworth tells me; what regiment?'

'I was in the old 50th for many a year, Captain,' he said, unconsciously standing erect and giving the salute. 'I served under Sir Hugh Gough in India, where I got this slash from a Mahratta sabre. Didn't seem a hard cut neither; the fellow just seemed to swing his wrist, careless-like, as he rode by, but it was nigh deep enough to take the "wick" out of me. Their swords was a deal sharper than ours, and their wooden scabbards kept 'em from getting blunt again. I had a great argument with my sergeant about it once,' continued the old man. 'I couldn't a-bear to see our poor chaps sliced up by them razor-edged tulwars, while our regulation swords was a'most too dull to cut through a quilted cotton helment. Ah! them was fine times,' said the old soldier, with so genuine a regret in his tones that Howard Effingham almost believed he had, for the first time in his life, fallen across a noble private, pleased with his profession, and anxious to return to it.

'I have rarely heard a soldier regret the army,' said he. 'But you still retain zeal for the service, I am pleased to find.'

'Well, sir, that's all very well,' said the philosophical man-at-arms; 'but what I was a-thinking of was the "loot." It's enough to bring tears into a man's eyes that served his Queen and country, to think of the things as we passed over. Didn't Jimmy O'Hara and two or three more men of my company get together once and made bold to stick up the priest of one of them temples. No great things either—gold earrings and bangles, and a trifle of gold mohurs, the priest's own. There was a copper-coloured, bronze-looking idol—regular heathen god, or some such cretur—which the priest kept calling out "Sammy" to, or "Swammi." The ugly thing had bright glittering eyes, and Jim wanted to get 'em out badly, but the priest said, "Feringhee wantee like this?" and he picked up a bit of glass, and smiled contempshus like. At last we left him and "Swammi," eyes and all. I don't ever deserve to have a day's luck, sir, agin, as long as I live.'

'Why so?' said Mr. Effingham, astonished at the high moral tone, which he had not been used to associate with the

light infantry man of the period. 'Not for taking the image away, surely?'

'No!' shouted the old man, roused from his ordinary respectful tone. 'But for leavin' him behind! That Sammy, sir, was pure gold, and his eyes was di'monds, di'monds! Think o' that. We left a thousand pound a man behind, because we didn't know gold when we seen it. It will haunt me, sir, to my dying day.'

The boys laughed at the unsentimental conclusion of the veteran's tale. Their father looked grave.

'I cannot approve of the plunder of religious edifices, Evans; though the temptation was too great for soldiers, and indeed for others in those days.'

The chief personages having retired, Mr. Effingham and his sons essayed to make their couch under the waggon.

'It is many a year since I had any experience in this kind of thing,' said he; 'but, if I remember rightly, it was in Spain that I bivouacked last. This locality is not unlike Estramadura. That rocky ravine, with the track running down it, is just where you would have expected to see the muleteer stepping gaily along beside his mules singing or swearing, as the case might be; and they do both with great vigour.'

'I remember Don Pedro, Captain,' said Dick. 'I mind the wine-skins putty well too. It wasn't bad stuff; but I don't know as dark brandy doesn't come handier if ye wants a stir up. But there's one thing you can't have forgot, Captain, that beats this country holler.'

'You must mean the fleas,' said Effingham; '*they* certainly could not be surpassed. I hope you don't mean to rival them here.'

Well, I don't deny, Captain, that in some huts, where the people aren't particular, in a sandy country, in summer you will find a few, and likewise them other reptiles, 'specially where there's pine slabs, but in a general way we're pretty clean in this country, and you've no call to be afeard to tackle your blankets.'

'I'm glad to hear it, Evans,' said Effingham, yawning. 'I have no doubt that your camp is always fit for inspection. I think we may say good-night.'

Between the keen air of the forest, and the unwonted exercise, a tendency to drowsiness now set in, which Mr.

Effingham and his sons discovered by the time that the blankets were drawn over them. The sides of their apartment, represented by the wheels of the waggon, were covered by the canvas tilt, the ceiling was low but sufficient. It was the ideal chamber in one respect. Ventilation was unimpeded, while shelter was secured.

CHAPTER III

THE NEW HOME

When Wilfred awoke from deep untroubled slumber, the sun seemed gazing at the encampment with haughty, fixed regard, as of a monarch, enthroned upon the summit of the purple mountain range.

Unwitting of the lengths (fortunately) to which the unsparing archer could go in Southern lands, he essayed to commence dressing.

Rising hurriedly, he was reminded by a tap on the head from the axle-tree that he was in a bedroom of restricted accommodation. More guarded in his after-movements he crawled outside, first placing on the dewy grass a rug upon which to stand. He commenced his toilette, and cast a comprehensive glance around.

The first thing he saw was the upright form of Richard Evans, who, returning from a search after his hobbled horses, drove them before him towards the camp, at the same time smoking his pipe with a serene and satisfied air. The morning was chilly, but he had not thought a coat necessary, and in a check shirt and moleskin trousers calmly braved an atmosphere not much above forty degrees Fahrenheit.

'This must be a fine climate,' said Wilfred to his father. 'We shall be well wrapped up till breakfast time, at any rate, and yet that old buffer is wandering about in his shirt-sleeves as if he were in Naples.'

'He is pretty hard-bitten, you may depend,' said Mr. Effingham. 'I think some of our old "die-hards" are as tough samples of humanity as could anywhere be met. I do

not uphold the British soldier as a model, but they were men in my time, beyond any manner of doubt.'

Dick marched up his team to the waggon, whence the lodgers had by this time issued—Andrew to make a fire near the tent, and Jeanie to penetrate that sacred enclosure, and presumably to act as tire-woman in the interior.

The shafts, which had served Dick as a sleeping apartment during the night, aided by a shroud of tarpaulin, were uplifted, and bagging being thereon stretched, were converted into a manger for the chaff and maize, which the horses quickly commenced to consume.

Presently Jeanie issued from the tent, and finding the camp-kettle boiling, proceeded to make tea. Andrew, in the meantime, milked the cow. The gridiron was brought into requisition, and certain mutton chops broiled. Eventually Mrs. Effingham and her daughters issued from the tent, fresh and dainty of aspect as if they had just left their bedrooms at The Chase. Then the day commenced, and also breakfast.

'Good-morning, O mother! Hail, O tender maidens! What do you think of camping out?' was Wilfred's greeting, 'Have you been sitting up weeping, or did you forget everything till daylight, as we did?'

'We all slept like tops,' said Annabel. 'I never was so sleepy in my life. I was almost off before I could undress. I think it's splendid. And oh! what is there for breakfast?'

Grilled chops, smoking cups of tea, with bread and butter, constituted the repast. Worse meals have been eaten. The appetites were, like the travellers, highly respectable. By the time the meal was finished, Mr. Richard Evans had harnessed his team, and bringing himself up to the attitude of 'attention,' requested to know when the ladies would like to make a start.

After consultation, it was notified to their guide and courier that as soon as the tent was struck and the baggage packed, every one would be ready.

The troops being in high health and spirits, in a comparatively short space of time the march was resumed. Wilfred and Guy walked ahead, fowling-piece in hand. Andrew drove the cow, which followed quietly in the rear.

The coupled greyhounds looked eagerly around, as if sensible that they were now in hunting country. They were with difficulty restrained when a wallaby, in two bounds, crossed the road and disappeared in an adjoining scrub.

The dry air was pure and fresh, the unclouded sky blue as a sapphire dome, the winding forest road free from all impediment but an occasional ledge of sandstone. If there is any portion of the day 'when the poor are rich in spirits and health,' when the heart of youth stirs, when age is soothed with dreams of happiness, it is in that sweetest hour which follows the early morning meal in rural Australia. Dawn is austere, mid-day often sultry, but nowhere will he, whose heart and intelligence respond alike gratefully to that charmed time, find its inspirations more invigorating than in the early summer of Australia. Then the fortunate traveller experiences coolness without cold, and warmth without the heat which produces lassitude.

As the waggon rolled easily along, the horses stepping cheerily on the track, the wayfarers paced over the unwonted herbage with an alertness of mien which would have suggested a very different history.

'How lovely the shrubs are that we see in all directions!' said Mrs. Effingham. 'What should we have given for that golden flowering mimosa at The Chase, or this blue-leaved, pink pointed tree, which I suppose must be a young eucalyptus. Here they are so common that no one heeds them, and yet there are rare plants enough to set up a dozen greenhouses.'

'Everything is so utterly different,' said Rosamond. 'I am most agreeably surprised at the landscape. What erroneous ideas one has of far countries! I suppose it is because we seldom feel sufficient interest to learn about them thoroughly. I pictured Australia a sandy waste, with burned-up reedy grass, and a general air of the desert. Now, here we have woods, a pretty little brook rippling by, rocks and hills, and in the distance a mountain. I could make quite an effective sketch.'

'The country isn't all like this, Miss,' said Dick Evans, with a deferential air. 'If you was to go two or three hundred miles into the bush, there's no timber at all; you'ld find it all sand and salt-bushes—the curiousest place ever you see.'

'How can it be the "bush,"' inquired Wilfred, 'if there are no trees? But we are not going so far, at any rate.'

'Finest grazing land out,' said Richard the experienced. 'All the stock rolling fat—no trouble in looking after 'em. If I was a young gentleman, that's the place I'd make for. Not but what Warbrok's a pleasant spot, and maybe the young ladies will like it better than the plains.'

'I fancy we all shall, Richard,' said Rosamond. 'The plains may be very well for sheep and cattle, but I prefer a woodland country like this. I suppose we can have a garden there?'

'Used to be the best garden in all the country-side, Miss, but the Warleighs were a wild lot; they let everything go to wrack. The trees and bushes is mostly wore out, but the sile's that good, as a handy man would soon make it ship-shape again.'

'What are we to do for lunch?' said Annabel, with some appearance of anxiety. 'If we are to go on roaming over the land from sunrise to sunset without stopping, I shall die of hunger—I'm sure I shall. I keep thinking about those cakes of Jeanie's.'

'My dear child,' said her mother, 'I daresay we shall manage to feed you and the rest of the flock. I am pleased to find that you have such a famous appetite. To be sure, you have not stopped growing yet, and this fresh air acts as a tonic. So far, we must not complain of the climate.'

'It's only a few miles furder on, ma'am, to the King Parrot Waterhole, where we can stop in the middle of the day, and have a bit to eat if the young ladies is sharp-set. I always stop on the road and feed my horses about twelve o'clock. And if the young gentlemen was to walk on, they might shoot a pair of ducks at the waterhole, as would come in handy for the pot.'

When about mid-day they reached the King Parrot Waterhole, a reed-fringed pool, about as large as their English horse-pond, they found Wilfred in possession of a pair of the beautiful grey-breasted wood-ducks (*Anas Boscha*), a teal, with chestnut and black feathers and a brilliant green neck, also a dark-furred kangaroo, which Dick pronounced to be a rock wallaby.

'Australia isn't such a bad place for game,' said Guy.

'We found the ducks swimming in the pool, three brace altogether, and "Damsel" caught this two-legged hare, as she thought it, as it was making up that stony hill. *I* like it better than Surrey.'

'We shall find out ever so many interesting things,' said Rosamond. 'I shall never feel thankful enough to that good old Professor Muste for teaching me the small bit of botany that I know. Now, look at this lovely Clianthus, is it not enough to warm the heart of a Trappist? And here is that exquisite purple Kennedya, which ought, in an Australian novel, to be wreathed round the heroine's hat. Do my eyes deceive me, or is not that a white heath? I must dig it up.'

'I believe, Rosamond, that you could comfort yourself on Mount Ararat,' said Annabel. 'Why, it will be *ages* before those ducks can be picked and roasted. Oh, Jeanie, Jeanie, can't we have them before tea-time? I wish I had never seen them.'

'If you like, you can help me take off the feathers, and spare Jeanie's everlastingly busy fingers,' said Beatrice.

Here Annabel looked ruefully at her tiny, delicate hands, with a child's pout.

'Oh, it's no use looking at your pretty hands,' said the more practical Beatrice. 'This is the land of work, and all who can't make themselves useful will be treated like the foolish virgins in the parable. It always makes me smile when that chapter is read. I can fancy Annabel holding out her lamp, with an injured expression, saying, "Well, nobody told me it was time to get ready."'

'Beatrice, my daughter,' said Mrs. Effingham gravely, 'sacred subjects are not befitting matter for idle talking; dispositions vary, and you may remember that Martha was not praised for her anxiety to serve.'

At mid-day the kettle bubbled on the fire, kindled by the ever-ready Richard, cakes and sandwiches were handed round, the tea—thanks to Daisy—was gratefully sipped.

The sun shone brightly on the green flat, where the horses grazed in peace and plenty. The birds chirped and called at intervals; all Nature seemed glad and responsive to the joyous season of the southern spring.

Thus their days wore on, in peaceful progression, alike free from toil, anxiety, or adventure. The daily stage was accom-

plished, under Dick's experienced direction, without mistake or misadventure. The evening meal was a time of rest and cheerful enjoyment, the night's slumbers refreshing and unbroken.

'What a delightful country this is! I feel quite a new creature, especially after breakfast,' exclaimed Annabel one morning. 'I could go on like this for months, till we reached the other side of the continent, if there is any other side. Will it be as nice as this, I wonder, at Malbrook, or Warbrok, or whatever they call it? Warbrok Chase won't look so bad on our letters, when we write home. I must send a sketch of it to cousin Elizabeth, with a bark cabin, of course. She will never believe that we have a real house to live in among the backwoods. What sort of a house is it, Dick? Is it thatched and gabled and damp and delightful, with dear little diamond casements like the keeper's lodge, or is it a horrid wooden barn? Tell me now, there's a dear old man!'

'We shall be there, Miss, the day after to-morrer, please God,' responded Dick with respectful solemnity. 'Parson Sternworth said I was to say nought about the place, but let it come on you suddent-like. And I'm a man as is used to obey orders.'

'Very well, you disagreeable old soldier,' said the playful maiden. 'I'll be even with you and the parson, as you call him. See if I don't.'

'Sorry to disobleege you, Miss Anniebell,' said the veteran, 'but if my old General, Sir Hugh Gough, was to come and say, "Corporal Richard Evans, hand me over the chart of the country," I should have to tell him that he hadn't got the counter-sign.'

'And quite right too, Evans,' interposed Mr. Effingham, 'to keep up your good old habits in a new country. Discipline is the soul of the army.'

'I was allers taught *that*, sir,' replied Dick, with an air of military reminiscence which would have befitted a veteran of the Great Frederick. 'But when we reaches Warbrok my agreement's out with the Parson, and Miss can order me about all day.'

In spite of Annabel's asseverations that the party would never reach the spot indicated, and that she believed there

never was any such place, but that Dick would lead them into a trackless forest and abandon them, the journey ended about the time specified. A rugged track, indeed, one afternoon tried their patience. The horses laboured, the docile cow limped and lagged, the girls complained, while Andrew's countenance became visibly elongated.

At length Dick Evans's wooden facial muscles relaxed, as halting on the hardly-gained hill-top he pointed with his whip-handle, saying simply, 'There's Warbrok! So the young ladies and gentlemen can see for theirselves.'

How eagerly did the whole party gaze upon the landscape, which now, in the clear light of the Southern eve, lay softly in repose before them!

The character of the scenery had changed with the wondrous suddenness peculiar to the land in which they had come to dwell. A picture set in a frame of forest and unfriendly thickets! Now before their eyes came with magical abruptness a vision of green slopes, tall groves, and verdurous meadows. It was one of nature's forest parks. Traces of the imperfect operations of a new country were visible, in felled timber, in naked, girdled trees, in unsightly fences. But nature was in bounteous mood, and had heightened the contrast with the barren region they had overpassed, by a flushed abundance of summer vegetation. This lavish profusion of herb and leaf imparted a richness of colouring, a clearness of tone, which in a less favourable season of the year Warbrok must perceptibly have lacked.

'Oh, what a lovely, lovely place!' cried Annabel, transported beyond herself as she stood on tip-toe and gazed rapturously at the scene. 'Those must be the Delectable Mountains. Dick, you are a Christian hero [the old man smiled deprecatingly], I forgive you on the spot. And there is the house, a *real* house with two storeys—actually two—I thought there were only cottages up the country—and an orchard; and is that a blue cloud or the sea? We must have turned round again. Surely it can't be *our lake?* That would be too heavenly, and those glorious mountains beyond!'

'That's Lake William, miss, called after His Gracious Majesty King William the Fourth,' explained Dick, accurate and reverential. 'Fourteen miles long and seven broad.

You'll find the house big enough, but it's a long way from being in good order; and it's a mercy there's a tree alive in the orchard.'

'Oh, never mind, we'll soon put things to rights, won't we, mamma? And what splendid creatures those old trees will be when they come out in leaf. I suppose it's too early in the spring yet?' continued she.

'Dead—every one of 'em, miss,' explained their conductor. 'They've been ring-barked, more's the pity. They was beauties when I knowed 'em fust, before the blessed tenants was let ruinate everything about the place. I wonder there's a stone of the house standing, that I do. And now, sir, we'll get on, and the young ladies can have tea in their own parlour, if my old woman's made a fire, accordin' to orders.'

The hearts of the more reflective portion of the party were too full for comment, so Annabel's chatter was allowed to run on unchecked. A feeling of despondency had been gradually stealing over Howard Effingham and his wife, as for the two last stages they had pictured to themselves the toil of building up a home amid the barren solitudes, such as, in their innocence, they thought their new property might resemble. Now, here was a spot in which they might live out their lives with cheerful and contented minds, thankful that 'their lines had fallen in pleasant places'; having reason to hope that their children might dwell in peace and prosperity after them.

'We can never be sufficiently grateful to your dear old friend,' said Mrs. Effingham. 'If he had not in the first place written you that letter, Howard, and afterwards acted upon his opinion so boldly, what might have been our fate?'

'He always used to look after me when we were in the regiment,' said her husband acquiescingly; 'I daresay he'll find a similar pleasure in taking charge of us now. Fortunately for you and the girls, he never married.'

A few miles only needed to be traversed before Mr. Evans triumphantly drove his team through the gate of the dilapidated garden fence surrounding the front of a large old-fashioned stone mansion, with wide verandah and lofty balcony, supported upon freestone pillars. A stout, elderly woman of decided aspect opened the creaking hall door,

and casting a searching glance at Mr. R. Evans, made the strangers welcome.

'I'm sure I'm very glad to see you, my lady,' said she, bobbing an antiquated curtsey, 'and you, sir, and the young ladies and gentlemen. I've done all I could to clean up the old barrack of a house; it was that lonesome, and made me frighted with ghosts, as I thought I'd never live to see you all; and Dick here, I knew there was no certainty of, as might have gone to Timor, or the Indies, and never let on a word about it. Please you to come in, my lady.'

'My old woman's temper is none of the best, Captain,' said Dick, stating the fact with philosophical calmness, 'but I'll warrant she's cleaned up as much as any two, and very bad it wanted it when Parson Sternworth brought us over.'

Now that a nearer view was afforded of the demesne and dwelling, it was evident that the place had been long abandoned to natural decay and sordid neglect. The fences were rotten, gapped, or fallen; the orchard, though the aged trees were high out of the reach of browsing cattle, had been used as a convenient species of stock paddock; the climbers, including a magnificent bignonia and a wistaria, the great laterals of which had erstwhile clothed the verandah pillars with beauty and bloom, were broken and twisted. In the rear of the building all the broken bottles and bones of the land appeared to be collected; while, with windows broken, shutters hanging on a single hinge, doors closing with difficulty, or impossible to open, all things told of the recklessness of ruined owners.

Still, in despite of all deficiencies, the essentials of value could not be overlooked. The house, though naked and desolate of aspect, was large and commodious, promising in its shingled roof and massive stone walls protection against the heat of summer, the cold of winter. The deep black mould needed but ordinary culture to respond generously. The offices might be mouldering and valueless, but the *land* was there, thinly timbered, richly grassed, well adapted for stock of all kinds. And though the gaunt limbs of the girdled trees looked sadly unpicturesque between the front of the house and the lake shore, some had been left untouched, and the grass was all the more richly swarded. The lake itself was a grand indisputable fact. It was deep and fresh,

abounding in water-fowl, a priceless boon to dwellers in a climate wherein a lack of rivers and permanent reservoirs is unhappily a distinguishing characteristic.

Let it not be supposed that Wilfred and his mother, the girls and Jeanie were outside the house all this time. Very promptly had Dick unloaded the household stores, pressing all able-bodied persons, including his wife, into the service, until the commissariat was safely bestowed under shelter. His waggon was taken to the rear, his horses unharnessed, and he himself in a marvellously short space of time enjoying a well-earned pipe, and advising Andrew to bestow Daisy's calf in a dilapidated but still convertible calf-pen, so that his mother might graze at ease, and yet be available for the family breakfast table in the morning.

'The grass here is fust-rate,' he said, in a tone of explanation to Andrew. 'There's been a lot of rain in spring. It's a pity but we had a few good cows to milk. It would be just play for you and me and the young master in the mornings. Teach him to catch hold like and learn him the use of his hands.'

'*Him* milk!' exclaimed Andrew, in a tone of horrified contempt. 'And yet—I dinna say but if it's the Lord's will the family should ha' been brocht to this strange land, it may be no that wrang that he should labour, like the apostles, "working with his hauns." There's guid warrant for't.'

Meanwhile, inside the house important arrangements were proceeding. The sitting-room, a great, bare apartment, had an ample fireplace, which threw out a genial warmth from glowing logs. There was a large, solid cedar table, which Mrs. Evans had rubbed and polished till the dark red grain of the noble wood was clearly visible. Also a dozen *real* chairs, as Annabel delightedly observed, stood around, upon which it was possible to enjoy the long-disused comfort of sitting down. Of this privilege she promptly availed herself.

The night-draperies were disposed in the chief bedchamber, though until the arrival of the furniture it was apparent that the primitive sleeping accommodation of the road would need to be continued. Mr. Effingham and his sons were luxuriously billeted in another apartment, where, after their axle-tree experiences, they did not pity themselves.

Andrew and his family were disposed of in the divisions

of the kitchen, which, in colonial fashion, was a detached building in the rear. Mr. and Mrs. Evans had, on their previous entry on the premises, located themselves in an outlying cottage (or hut, as they called it), formerly the abode of the dairyman, where their possessions had no need of rearrangement. Even the dogs had quarters allotted to them, in the long range of stabling formerly tenanted by many a gallant steed in the old extravagant days of the colony, when unstinted hospitality and claret had been the proverbial rule at Warbrok.

'Oh dear!' exclaimed Annabel from her chair, 'what a luxurious feeling it is to be once more in a *home* of one's own! Though it's a funny old place and must have been a tempting refuge for ghosts wandering in search of quarters. And then to think that to-morrow morning we shall not have to move on, for ever and ever. I was beginning to get the least bit tired of it; were not you, mamma? Though I would have died sooner than confess it.'

'Words cannot describe how thankful I am, my dear child,' said her mother, 'that we have had the good fortune to end this land journey so well. It is the first one of the kind I ever undertook, and I trust it will be the last. But let us remember in our prayers to-night *whose* hand has shielded us from the perils of the deep, and whatever dangers we may have escaped upon the land.'

'I feel as if we had all been acting a charade or an extended *tableau vivant*,' said Rosamond. 'Like you, Annabel, dear, I am not sorry that the theatricals are over, though the play has been a success so far. It has no more nights to run, fortunately for the performers. Our everyday life will commence to-morrow. We must enter upon it in a cheerful, determined spirit.'

'I cannot help fancying,' said Beatrice, 'that colonial travellers enjoy an unnecessary amount of prestige, or some experiences must differ from ours. We might have had a Dick who would have lost his horses or overturned the waggon, and bushrangers (there *are* bushrangers, for I saw in a paper that Donohoe and his gang had "stuck-up," whatever that means, Mr. Icely's drays and robbed them) might have taken us captive. We have missed the romance of Australian life evidently.'

Howard Effingham felt strangely moved as he walked slowly forth at dawn. He watched the majestic orb irradiate the mist-shrouded turrets of the great mountain range which lay to the eastward. Endless wealth of colour was evoked by the day-god's kiss, softly, stealingly, suffusing the neutral-tinted dome, then with magical completeness flashing into supernal splendour. The dew glistened upon the vernal greensward. The pied warbler rolled his richest notes in flute-like carol. The wild-fowl, on the glistening mirror of the lake, swam, dived, or flew in playful pursuit. The bracing air was unspeakably grateful to Howard Effingham's rurally attuned senses. Amid this bounty of nature in her less sophisticated aspects, his heart swelled with the thought that much of the wide champaign, the woodland, and the water, over which his eye roamed wonderingly, called him master. He saw, with the quick projection of a sanguine spirit, his family domiciled once more with comfort and security. And not without befitting dignity, so long despaired of. He prized the ability to indulge again the disused pursuits of a country life. Though in a far land, among strange people, separated by a whole ocean from the scenes of his youth and manhood, he now felt for the first time since the great disaster that contentment, even happiness, was possible. Once more he felt himself a country gentleman, or at the least an Australian squire. With the thought he recalled the village chimes in their lost home, and his wife's reference of every circumstance of life to the special dispensation of a benign, overruling Providence occurred to him. With unconscious soliloquy he exclaimed, 'I have not deserved this; God be merciful to me a sinner!'

Dick Evans, with his horses, now appeared upon the scene, bells, hobbles, and all. He bore every appearance of having been up at least two hours.

'What a wonderful old fellow that is!' said Wilfred, who had joined his father; 'day or night seems alike to him. He is always hard at work at something or other—always helpful and civil, apparently good at a score of trades, yet military as a pipe-clayed belt. Mr. Sternworth admitted that he had faults, but up to this time we have never discovered them.'

'If he has none, he is such an old soldier as I have never

met,' said his father mildly. 'Longer acquaintance will, I suppose, abate his unnatural perfection. But, in any case, we must keep him on until we are sufficiently acclimatised to set up for ourselves.'

'Quite so, sir! We cannot have our reverend mentor always at beck and call. We want some one here who knows the country and its ways. Guy and I will soon pick up the lie of the land, as he calls it, but at present we are all raw and ignorant together.'

'Then we had better engage him at once. I suppose he can tell us the proper wages.'

'Very possibly; but now I think of it, sir, hadn't you better delegate the executive department to me? Of course to carry out your instructions, but you might do worse than appoint me your responsible minister.'

'My boy!' said Effingham, grasping his son's hand, 'I should have made the suggestion if you had not anticipated me. I cheerfully yield the management to you, as you will have the laborious part of the work. Many things will need to be done, for which I am unfit, but which you will gradually master. I fully trust you, both as an example to Guy and Selden, and the guardian of your mother and sisters.'

'As God will help me in my need, they will need no other,' replied the eldest son. 'So far I have led a self-indulgent life. But the spur of necessity (you must admit) has been wanting. Now the hour has come. You never refused me a pleasure; trust me to fulfil every duty.'

'I never have doubted it, my boy! I always knew that higher qualities were latent in your nature. As you say, the hour has come. We were never laggards when the trumpet-call sounded. And now, let us join the family party.'

As they reached the house, from which they had rambled some distance, the sun was two hours high, and the smoke issuing from the kitchen chimney denoted that culinary operations were in progress. At that moment a serviceable-looking dogcart, drawn by a wiry, roan horse, trotted briskly along the track from the main road, and in drawing up, displayed in the driver the welcome presentment of the Rev. Harley Sternworth.

'How do, Howard? How are you, Wilfred, my boy? Welcome to Warbrok—to Warbrok Chase, that is. I shall

learn it in time. Very proper addendum ; suits the country, and gratifies the young ladies' taste. Thought I'd catch you at your first breakfast. Here, Dick, you old rascal—that is, you deserving veteran—take Roanoke.'

The somewhat decided features of the old army chaplain softened visibly as, entering the bare uncarpeted apartment, he descried Mrs. Effingham and her daughters sitting near the breakfast table, evidently awaiting the master of the house. His quick eye noticed at once the progress of feminine adaptation, as well as the marked air of comfort produced with such scanty material.

He must surely have been gratified by the sensation he produced. The girls embraced him, hanging upon his words with eagerness, as on the accents of the recovered relative of the melodrama. Mrs. Effingham greeted him with an amount of warmth foreign to her usual demeanour. The little ones held up their faces to be kissed by 'Uncle Harley.'

'We are just going to have our first breakfast,' said Annabel. 'Sit down this very minute. Haven't we done wonders?'

Indeed, by the fresh, morning light, the parlour already looked homelike and attractive. The breakfast table, 'decored with napery,' as Caleb Balderstone phrased it, had a delicately clean and appetising appearance. A brimming milk jug showed that the herbage of Warbrok had not been without its effect upon their fellow-passenger from the Channel Islands. A goodly round of beef, their last roadside purchase, constituted the *pièce de résistance*. A dish of eggs and bacon, supplied by Mrs. Evans, whose poultry travelled with her everywhere, and looked upon the waggon as their home, added to the glory of the repast. A large loaf of fresh bread, baked by the same useful matron, stood proudly upon a plate, near the roadside tea equipage, and a kettle like a Russian *samovar*. Nor was artistic ornamentation wholly absent. Annabel had fished up a broken vase from a lumber room, which, filled with the poor remnants of the borders, 'where once a garden smiled,' and supplemented with 'wild buttercups and very nearly daisies,' as she described the native flora, made an harmonious contribution.

Before commencing the meal, as Mr. Effingham took his

seat at the head of his own table once more, humble as were the surroundings, his wife glanced at the youngest darling, Blanche. She ran across to a smaller table covered with a rug, and thence lifting off a volume of some weight, brought it to their guest. His eyes met those of his old comrade and of her his life's faithful companion. The chaplain's eyes were moistened, in despite of his efforts at composure. What recollections were not summoned up by the recurrence of that simple household observance? His voice faltering, at first, with genuine emotion, Harley Sternworth took the sacred volume, and read a portion, before praying in simple phrase, that the Great Being who had been pleased to lead the steps of His servants to this far land, would guide them in all their ways, and prosper the work of their hands in their new home. 'May His blessing be upon you all, and upon your children's children after you, in this the land of our adoption,' said the good priest, as he arose in the midst of the universal amen.

'Do you know that it was by no means too warm when I left Yass at daylight this morning? This is called a hot climate. But in our early summer we have frosts sometimes worthy of Yorkshire. Yesterday there was rather a sharp one. We shall have rain again soon.'

'Oh, I hope not,' said Annabel. 'This is such lovely, charming weather. So clear and bright, and not at all too warm. I should like it to last for months.'

'Then, my dear young lady, we should all be ruined. Rain rarely does harm in this country. Sometimes there are floods, and people who live on meadowlands suffer. But the more rain the merrier, in this country at least. It is a land of contradictions, you know. Your Lake William, here, will never overflow, so you may be easy in your minds, if it rains ever so hard.'

'And what does my thoughtful young friend, Rosamond, think of the new home?' inquired the old gentleman, looking at her with affectionate eyes.

'She thinks, Uncle Sternworth, that nothing better for us all could have been devised in the wide world, unless the Queen had ordered her Ministers to turn out Sir Percy de Warrenne and put us in possession of Old Court. Even that, though Sir Percy is a graceless kinsman, might not

have been so good for us, as making a home for ourselves here, out of our own heads, as the children say.'

'And you are quite satisfied, my dear?'

'More than satisfied. I am exulting and eager to begin work. In England I suffered sometimes from want of occupation. Here, every moment of the day will be well and usefully employed.'

'And Miss Beatrice also approves?'

'*Miss* Beatrice says,' replied that more difficult damsel, who was generally held to be reserved, if not proud, 'she would not have come to Australia if it could have been helped. But having come, supposes she will not make more useless lament than other people.'

'Beatrice secretly hates the country, I know she does,' exclaimed Annabel, 'and it is ungrateful of her, particularly when we have such a lovely place, with a garden, and a lake, and mountains and sunsets, and everything we can possibly want.'

'I am not so imaginative as to expect to live on mountains and sunsets, and I must confess it will take me a long time to become accustomed to the want of *nearly* all the pleasures of life, but I suppose I shall manage to bear up my share of the family burdens.'

'You have always done so hitherto, my dear,' said Mrs. Effingham; 'but you are not fond of putting forward your good deeds—hardly sufficiently so, as I tell you.'

'Some one has run away with Beatrice's share of vanity,' said Rosamond. 'But we must not stay talking all the morning. I am chief butler, and shall have to be chief baker too, perhaps, some day. I must break up the meeting, as every one has apparently breakfasted.'

'And I must have a serious business conversation with your father and Wilfred,' said Mr. Sternworth. 'Where is the study—the library, I mean? Not furnished yet! Well, suppose we adjourn to the ex-drawing-room. It's a spacious apartment, where the late tenant, a practical man, used to store his maize. There is a deal table, for I put it there myself. Guy, you may as well ask Dick Evans to show you the most likely place for wild-fowl. Better bring chairs, Wilfred. We are going to have a "sederunt," as they say in Scotland.'

CHAPTER IV

MR HENRY O'DESMOND OF BADAJOS

'Now, Howard, my young friend!' said the worthy man, as they settled themselves at a small table, near a noble mantelpiece of Australian gray marble, curiously marked with the imprints of the fossil encrinite, 'I address you as I used to do in our army days, for, with regard to money matters, I feel sure you are as young as ever. In the first place, I must render an account of my stewardship. Observe, here is the conveyance to you and your heirs for ever of the estate of Warbrok, a Crown grant to Colonel Rupert Falkland Warleigh, late of Her Majesty's 80th Regiment, dated as far back as 1805, comprising 5174 acres, 1 rood, 3 perches, by him devised in equal shares to his sons—Randal, Clement, and Hubert. It was not entailed, as were most of the early grants. They fell away from the traditions of the family, and lived reckless, dissipated lives. Their education was neglected—perhaps not the best example exhibited to them by the old Colonel—he was always a gentleman though—what wonder the poor boys went wrong? They came to be called the "Wild Warleighs of Warbrok." At last the end came. Hopelessly in debt, they were forced to sell. Here are their signatures, duly attested. Your purchase money, at the rate of 10s. per acre—a low price, but ready money was very scarce in the colony at the time—amounted to £2587 : 5s., mentioned as the consideration. Out of your draft for £3000 remained, therefore, £412 : 15s.; expenses and necessary farm work done, with wages to Dick Evans and his wife, have amounted to £62 : 7s. This includes the ploughing and sowing of a paddock—a field you would call it—of 20 acres of wheat, as

the season had to be availed of. I hand you a deposit receipt for £350 : 8s., lodged to your credit in the Bank of New Holland, at Yass, where I advise you to place the rest of your capital, and I thereby wash my hands of you, pecuniarily, for the present.'

'My dear old friend,' said Effingham, 'it is not for the first time that you have pulled me through a difficulty, though never before did we face one like this. But how comes it that I have money to receive? I thought the draft of £3000 would barely suffice to pay for the estate.'

'You must know that I transacted this piece of business through a solicitor, a shrewd man of business, who kept my counsel, making no sign until the property was put up to auction. The terms being cash, he had a decided advantage, and it was not known until after the sale, for whom he had purchased. So the Warleighs having retired, we must see what the Effinghams will make of it.'

'There will be no riotous living, at any rate,' said Wilfred; 'and now, as you have done with the Governor, please advise me as to our future course. I am the duly-appointed overseer—I believe that is the proper title—and intend to begin work this very day.'

'Couldn't do better. We may as well call Dick Evans into council. He was hired by me at 18s. per week, with board and lodging. For this wage he engaged to give his own and wife's services, also those of his team and waggon. The wages are under the ordinary rate, but he explained that his horses would get fat here, and that he liked being employed on a place like Warbrok, and under an ex-officer in Her Majesty's service. I should continue the engagement for a few months, at all events; you will find him most useful.'

'Up to this time he has been simply perfect,' said Wilfred. 'It's a pleasure to look at such an active worker—so respectful, too, in his manner.'

'Our experience of the Light Infantry man, Howard,' said Mr. Sternworth, 'must prevent us from fully endorsing Wilfred's opinion, but Dick Evans is a good man; at all country work better, indeed, than most of his class. Let us hear what he says.'

Probably anticipating some such summons he was not far

off, having returned from showing Guy a flock of wild-fowl. He walked into the room and, saluting, stood at ease, as if such a thing as a chair had never been by him encountered in the whole course of existence.

'Corporal Evans!—pshaw! that is, Dick,' said the worthy ex-military priest, 'I have sent for you to speak to Captain Effingham, and Mr. Wilfred, who is to be farm manager and stock overseer. I have told them that you are the very man for the place, when you behave yourself.' Here the keen grey eyes looked somewhat sternly at Mr. Evans, who put on a look of mild surprise. 'Are you willing to hire for six months at the same rate of wages, with two rations, at which I engaged you? You will work your team, I know, reasonably; and Mrs. Evans will wash and help the ladies in any way she can?'

'Well, Mr. Chaplain, the wages is not too high,' replied Evans, 'but I like the place, and my horses knows the run, and does well here. *You* know I like to serve a gentleman, 'specially one that's been in the service. I'll stay on at the same rate for six months.'

'Well, that's settled. Now, let us have a talk about requirements. How to use the grass to the best advantage?'

'There's no better place in the country-side for dairying,' said Dick, addressing himself to his clerical employer, as alone capable of understanding the bearings of the case; 'it's a wonderful fine season, and there's a deal of grass going to waste. There's stray cattle between here and the other end of the lake as will want nothing better than to clear it all off, as they're used to do, if we're soft enough to let 'em. Many a good pick they've had over these Warbrok flats, and they naturally looks for it again, 'specially as there's a new gentleman come as don't know the ways of the country. Now, what I should do, if I was the master, would be to buy two or three hundred mixed cattle—there's a plenty for sale just now about Yass—and start a dairy. We might make as much butter between now and Christmas as would pay middlin' well, and keep other people's cattle from coming on the place and eating us out of house and home, in a manner of speakin'.'

'Good idea, Richard,' said Mr. Sternworth; 'but how about the yard and cowshed? It's nearly all down, and half-rotten.

Mr. Effingham doesn't want to engage fencers and splitters, and have all the country coming here for employment.'

'There's no call for that, sir,' said the many-sided veteran. 'I had a look at the yard this morning. If I had a man to help me for a fortnight I'll be bound to make it cattle-proof with a load of posts and rails, that I could run out myself, only we want a maul and wedges.'

'I'll be your man,' said Wilfred, 'if that's all that's necessary. I may as well learn a trade without delay. Andrew can help, too, I daresay.'

'*He's* not much account,' quoth Dick disdainfully. 'He thinks he knows too much already. These new hands—no offence to you, sir—is more in the way than anything else. But if you'll buckle to, sir, we'll soon make a show.'

'I know a stock agent who can get the exact cattle you want,' said Mr. Sternworth. 'He told me that Mr. O'Desmond had a hundred young cows and heifers for sale. They are known to be a fine breed of cattle.'

'The best in the country,' said Dick. 'Old Harry O'Desmond never had any but right down good horses, cattle, and sheep at Badajos, and if we give a little more for them at the start it will be money saved in the end. He's the man to give us an extra good pick, when he knows they're for an officer and a gentleman.'

'Our friend Richard has aristocratic notions, you observe,' said the parson, smiling. 'But Harry O'Desmond is just the man to act as he says. You will do well to treat with him.'

'Only too happy,' said Effingham. 'Everything arranges itself with surprising ease, with your aid. Is this kind of settling made easy to go on for ever? It was almost a pity we took the voyage at all. You might have made our fortunes, it seems to me, as a form of recreation, and left us to receive the profits in England.'

'And how am I to be paid, you heedless voluptuary, may I ask, if not by the presence of your charming family? Since I've seen them I wouldn't have had the colony lose them for twice the value of the investment. Besides, seriously, if the seasons change or a decline takes place in the stock market you'll need all *your* brains and Wilfred's to keep the ship afloat. Never lose sight of the fact that this is an uncertain land, with a more uncertain climate.'

'It's all right if you don't overstock, sir,' spoke the practical Richard. 'But Mr. Sternworth's right. I mind the '27 drought well. We was forced to live upon kangaroo soup, rice, and maize meal, with marshmallers and "fat hen" for a little salad. But they say the climate's changed like, and myster than it used to be.'

'Climates *never* change in their normal conditions,' said Sternworth positively. 'Any assertion to the contrary is absurd. What has been will be again. Let us make such provision as we can against droughts and other disasters, and leave the rest to Providence, which has favoured this land and its inhabitants so far.'

'The fences seem dilapidated. Ought they not to be repaired at once?' said Wilfred.

'By degrees, all in good time,' said the old gentleman testily. 'We must not go deeply into "improvements," as they are called here, lest they run away with our money at the commencement of affairs. Dick will explain to you that the cattle can be kept in bounds without fencing for a time. And now I feel half a farmer and half an exhausted parson. So I think I must refresh myself with another look at the lady part of the establishment, have a mouthful of lunch, and start for home.'

'It's a murder you didn't take to farming, sir, like Parson Rocker,' said Dick, with sincere regret in his tones. 'You'd ha' showed 'em whether sojer officers can't make money, though the folks here don't think so.'

'I have my own work, Richard,' said the old gentlemen. 'It may be that there is occasionally rather more of the church militant about me than is prudent. But the town and neighbourhood of Yass will be the better for old Harley Sternworth's labours before we say farewell to one another.'

'I can now leave you all with perfect confidence,' he said after lunch, as Dick Evans brought Roanoke and the dogcart to the door. 'The next time I come I must bring an old friend to pay his respects, but that will not be till the furniture has arrived. I foresee you will make astonishing changes, and turn The Chase into the show mansion of the district. I must bring you some of my "Souvenirs de Malmaison" and "Madame Charles." "The Cloth of Gold" and others I see you have. I am prouder of my roses than of my sermons, I

think. I don't know which require most care in pruning. Good-bye, my dear friends!'

The roan tossed his head, and set off at such a pace along the grass-grown track which led to the main 'down the country' road, as the highway from Yass to Sydney was provincially termed, that it was easy to see he had been making a calculation as to the homeward route. The girls looked after the fast-receding vehicle for a while before recommencing their household tasks. Howard Effingham and his wife walked to and fro along the pleasant sun-protected colonnade of the south verandah. When they separated, little had been said which was free from praise of their tried friend, or from thankfulness to the Almighty Disposer of events, who had shown them His mercy in the day of need.

This eventful colloquy concluded, settled daily employment commenced for all the denizens of The Chase. They rose early, and each one attended to the duties allotted by special arrangement. Breakfast over, Wilfred shouldered an axe and marched off with Dick Evans to some forest tree, to be converted into posts and rails for the fast-recovering dairy-yard.

Andrew had betaken himself to the renovation of the orchard and garden with grateful persistence, as he recalled his earlier feats at the English home of the family, duly thankful for the opportunity of exercising his energies in a direction wherein he could show himself capable.

'It's gra-and soil,' he was pleased to observe, 'and I hae nae doot whatever that I shall be able to grow maist unco-omon vegetables, gin I had some food—that is, manure—to gie the puir things. The trees are sair negleckit and disjaskit, but they'll come round wi' care and the knife. The spring is a thocht advanced, as that auld carle Evans has gi'en me to understand. I winna say he's no auld farrand wi' a' the "bush" ways, as they ca' them, but he's an awfu' slave o' Satan wi' his tongue—just fearsome. But gin ye'll put me a fence round this bit park, Maister Wilfred, I'll show yon folks here that auld Andrew Cargill can grow prize kail in baith hemispheres.'

'We are going to split some palings before we are done,' said Wilfred, smiling at the old man's rounding off of his sentence. 'Then we'll pull this old fence down and take in

more ground, so that you may exercise your landscape gardening talent.'

'This bit garden will keep my body employed and my thochts frae unprofitable wanderings, brawly, during this season o' inexperience. Ye see, Maister Wilfred, it wadna become me, as a pairson o' reflection, to da-ash presumptuously into a' matters o' practice, but they canna haud me to obsairve and gather up the ootcome of thae bush maitters, and bide my time a wee, till the day comes when I can take my place at the laird's right hand ance mair.'

'No one will be better pleased than I shall be, Andrew,' said Wilfred, heartily grasping the hand of his faithful servitor. 'But we must all serve apprenticeship in this new land. We shall not be long before we can give a guess at the course of the ship, and take our trick at the wheel as well as others. Meanwhile, this old Dick Evans seems to be a wonderful Jack-of-all-trades, and we must be content to learn from him for the present.'

'I'll no deny that he kens maist things befitting a dweller in the wilderness. The de'il's aye guid at gifts to his ain folk. But, wae's me, he's lightsome and profane abune a' belief.'

The great event of the year, after all, was the arrival of the drays with the heavy luggage and the furniture reserved from sale.

Joy and thankfulness all too deep for words greeted the welcome wains, promptly unladen, and their inestimable contents brought into the shelter of the wide verandah before unpacking.

'I never could have believed,' said Mrs. Effingham, 'that anything in Australia could have had the power to afford me so much pleasure. The refurnishing of our house at The Chase never produced half such pleasure as I now feel at the prospect of seeing the old tables and chairs, the sideboard, and my dear old davenport again.'

'And the piano!' cried Annabel. 'What a luxury to us, who have been tuneless and songless all these months! Even the morning "scales" would have been better than nothing. I shall really go in for steady practising—I know I never did before. There is nothing like being starved a little.'

'Starving seems to agree with you in a bodily sense,' said

Rosamond, 'if I may judge from certain alterations of dresses. But you are right in believing that it gives a wonderful relish for mental food. Look at these two lovely boxes of books. The library was sold, but here are many of our old favourites. How I shall enjoy seeing their faces again!'

'I am certain Jeanie must have *stolen* a quantity of things after the sale,' asserted Beatrice, who had been examining the externals of the packages; 'bedding and curtains, and every kind of thing likely to be useful. I expect my room will be so like the one at the old Chase that I shall never find out the difference of a morning, till I go downstairs and see the verandahs.'

'There are no verandahs in England,' said Guy, who was one of the 'fatigue party,' as Dick expressed it. 'They ought to take a hint from the colonies—stunning places they make on a wet day, or a hot one, I can tell you.'

'Where shall we tek this sideboard, mem?' said Dick Evans, with his ultra-respectful, family-servant intonation.

'Into the dining-room, of course,' screamed the delighted Annabel. 'Why, *every* room in the house will be furnished more or less; it will be quite a palace.'

Willing hands abounded, Mr. Evans in person superintending the opening of the cases, taking care to draw nails in order to fit the boards for future usefulness, so that, very shortly, the whole English shipment was transferred to its final Australian resting-place.

Robinson Crusoe, when he had made the last successful raft-passage and transhipment from the Guinea trader before she went down, could not have been more grateful than our deported friends when the litter and the cases and Dick and Andrew were cleared off, and they were free to gloat over their precious property.

How different the rooms looked! There was an air of comfort and refinement about the well-preserved furniture which was inexpressibly comforting to the ex-dwellers in tents. The large rooms looked perhaps a shade too bare, but in warm climates an Indian non-obtrusion of upholstering is thought becoming. The well-remembered tones of the piano, which glorified an unoccupied corner of the drawing-room, echoed through that spacious apartment, now provided with a carpet almost as good as new, which Jeanie's provident

care had abstracted from the schoolroom at The Chase. The dear old round table was there, 'out of mother's morning-room; the engravings from father's study, particularly those favourite ones of "The fighting Temeraire" and "Talavera"—all were here. When the climbers grew up over the verandah pillars, shading the front windows with the purple masses of the wistaria, there might be a prettier room in Sydney, but in the bush they were sure it was unsurpassed.'

Nor were Andrew and Jeanie devoid of personal interest in the arrival of the treasure-waggons. Certain garden tools and agricultural implements, dear to Andrew's practical soul, now gladdened his eyes, also a collection of carefully packed seeds. Besides all these, a rigorously select list of necessaries in good order and preservation, once the pride of his snug cottage, came to hand. For days after this arrival of the Lares and Penates, the work of rearrangement proceeded unceasingly. Mrs. Effingham and Rosamond placed and replaced each article in every conceivable position. Annabel played and sang unremittingly. Jeanie rubbed and polished, with such anxious solicitude, that table and chair, wardrobe and sideboard, shone like new mahogany. Beatrice had possessed herself of the bookcase, and after her morning share of housekeeping work was performed, read, save at dinner, without stopping until it was time to go for that evening walk which the sisters never omitted.

Once it fell upon a day that a gentleman rode up in leisurely fashion towards the entrance gate. He was descried before he came within a hundred yards, and some trepidation ensued while the question was considered as to who should take his horse, and how that valuable animal should be provided for.

Mr. Effingham, Guy, and Wilfred were away at the stock-yard, which by this time was reported to be nearly in a state of efficiency. Andrew had disappeared temporarily. The gentleman, for such plainly was his rank, was a stalwart, distinguished-looking personage, sitting squarely, and with something of military pose in his saddle. He was mounted upon a handsome, carefully-groomed hackney. He reined up at the dilapidated garden fence, and after looking about and seeing no appearance of an entrance gate, as indeed that portal had been long blocked up by rails, gathered up his

reins, and clearing the two-railed fence with practised ease, rode along the grass-grown path to the front door of the house. At the same moment Dick Evans, who had just arrived with a load of palings, appeared from the rear, and took his horse.

The stranger briskly dismounted, and knocked at the hall door with the air of a man who was thoroughly acquainted with the locale. He bowed low to Mrs. Effingham who opened it.

'Permit me to make myself known as Henry O'Desmond, one of your neighbours, my dear madam,' said he, with the high-bred air of a man of the world of fashion, who possesses also the advantage of being an Irishman. 'I presume I am addressing Mrs. Effingham. I have anticipated the proper time for paying my respects; but there has been a matter of business named by my agent, in which I hope to be able to serve Captain Effingham. He is quite well, I trust?'

Mrs. Effingham explained that her husband had been perfectly well that morning; furthermore, if Mr. O'Desmond would give them the pleasure of his company to lunch, he would be enabled to make his acquaintance.

That gentleman bowed with an air of heartfelt gratitude, and asserted that it would give him the sincerest gratification to have such an opportunity of meeting Captain Effingham, to which he had looked forward, since hearing of the good fortune that was about to befall the district, from his respected friend the Rev. Mr. Sternworth.

Being introduced to the young ladies, Mr. O'Desmond, a handsome, well-preserved man, promptly demonstrated that he was capable of entertaining himself and them until his host should think fit to arrive. Indeed, when Mrs. Effingham, who had left the room for reasons connected with the repast, returned, having captured her husband, and superintended his toilet, she found her daughters and their guest considerably advanced in acquaintance.

'Oh, papa,' said Annabel, 'Mr. O'Desmond says there's such a lovely view about ten miles from here—a ravine full of ferns, actually *full* of them; and a waterfall—a real one! It is called Fern-tree Gorge; and he has invited us all to a picnic there some day.'

'Very happy to make Mr. O'Desmond's acquaintance,' said Effingham, advancing with a recollection of old days

strong upon him. 'We are hardly aware yet in what consists the proper proportion of work and play in Australia; and in how much of the latter struggling colonists can indulge. We shall be very grateful for information on the subject.'

'And right welcome you are, my dear sir, to both, especially to the latter. They'll tell you that Harry O'Desmond is not unacquainted with work during the twenty years he has spent in this wild country. But for fun and recreation he'll turn his back on no man living.'

'Here is my lieutenant, and eldest son; permit me to introduce him. He is burning to distinguish himself in the practical line.'

'Then he couldn't have a better drill instructor than my old acquaintance, Dick Evans—wonderfully clever in all bush work, and scrupulous after his own fashion. But, see here now, I came partly to talk about cows, till the young ladies put business clean out of my head. I'm told you want to buy cattle, Mr. Wilfred; if you'll mount your horse and take old Dick with you to-morrow morning, he'll show you the way to Badajos, and I'll pick you the best hundred cows this day in the country.'

This was held to be an excellent arrangement, and lunch being now proclaimed, a temporary cessation of all but society talk took place. Every one being in the highest spirits, it was quite a brilliant symposium. It was a novel luxury to be again in the society of a pleasant stranger, well read, travelled, and constitutionally agreeable. O'Desmond sketched with humour and spirit the characteristic points of their nearest neighbours; slightly satirised the local celebrities in their chief town of Yass; and finally departed, having earned for himself the reputation of an agreeable, well-bred personage; a perfect miracle of a neighbour, when ill-hap might have made him equally near and unchangeably disagreeable.

'What a delightful creature!' said Annabel. 'Didn't some one say before we left home that there were no gentlemen in Australia—only "rough colonists"? I suppose that English girls will call us "rough colonists" when we've been here a few years. Why, he's like—oh, I know now—he's the very image of the Knight of Gwynne. Fancy lighting on

a facsimile of that charming old dear—of course Mr. Desmond is not nearly so old. He's not young though, and takes great care of himself, you can see.'

'He's not so *very* old, Annabel,' said Beatrice mischievously. 'That is the kind of man I should advise you to marry. Not a foolish boy of five-and-twenty.'

'Thank you, Beatrice,' said Annabel, with dignity. 'I'll think over it and let you know. I don't think it's probable I should ever marry any one only a little older than myself. What could he know? I should laugh at him if he was angry. But Wilfred is going over to Badajos, or whatever is the name of the O'Desmond's place, to-morrow, so he can bring us back a full, true, and particular account of everything, and whether Rosamond, or you, dear, would be the fitter helpmate for him. I'm too young and foolish at present, and might be more so—that is, foolish, not young, of course.'

'I notice that the air of this climate seems to have a peculiar effect upon young people's tongues,' said the soft voice of Mrs. Effingham. 'They seem to run faster here than in England.'

Mr. Desmond's property, Badajos, was nearly twenty miles from Warbrok Chase. As it had been clearly settled that Wilfred should go there on the following day, arrangements had to be made. Dick must accompany him for the double purpose of confirming any selection of cattle. That veteran cheerfully endorsed the idea, averring that now the yard was all but finished, and the fencing stuff drawn in, leave of absence could be well afforded. He therefore put on a clean check shirt, and buckled a pea-jacket in front of his saddle, which he placed upon his old mare, and was ready for the road.

Provided with a stock-whip, taken from his miscellaneous possessions, with lighted pipe and trusty steed, his features wore the expression of anticipated happiness, which distinguishes the schoolboy out for a holiday. He passed Andrew Cargill with an air of easy superiority, as that conscientious labourer, raising his moistened brow as he delved at the long-untilled beds, could not refrain from a look of astonishment at this new evidence of universal capacity, as he marked Dick's easy seat and portentous whip.

He muttered, 'I wadna doot but that the auld graceless sorrow can ride through braes and thickets, and crack yon muckle clothes-line they ca' a stock-wheep like ony lad. The de'il aye makes his peets o' masterfu' men, wae's me.'

A difficulty arose as to Wilfred's steed. Mr. Sternworth had declined the delicate task of remount agent. Thus The Chase was temporarily unprovided with horseflesh. However, Dick Evans was not a man to be prevented from carrying out a pleasant expedition for want of a horse to ride. Sallying out early, he had run in a lot of the ownerless animals, always to be found in the neighbourhood of unstocked pastures. Choosing from among them a sensible-looking cob, and putting Wilfred's English saddle and bridle on him, he led him up to the garden gate, where he stood with his ordinary air of deep respectability.

'I was just wondering how in the world I was to get a horse,' said Wilfred. 'I see you have one. Did you borrow, or buy, or steal one for my use?'

'I've been many a year in this country, Mr. Wilfred, without tekkin' other people's property, and I'm too old to begin now. But there's 2C on this chestnut pony's near shoulder. I'm nigh sure it's Bill Chalker's colt, as he lost two years ago, and told me to keep him in hand, if ever I came acrost him.'

'Then I may ride him without risk of being tried for horse-stealing, or lynched, if they affect that here,' said Wilfred gaily. 'I shouldn't care to do it in England, I know.'

'Things is quite different on the Sydney Side,' said Mr. Evans with mild dogmatism.

Wilfred did not consider this assertion to be conclusive, but time pressing, and the ready-saddled horse inviting his approval, he compounded with his conscience by taking it for granted that people were not particular as to strayed horses. The fresh and spirited animal, which had not been ridden for months, but was (luckily for his rider) free from vice, snorted and sidled, but proceeded steadily in the main. He soon settled down to the hand of a fair average horseman.

Noticing fresh objects of interest in each flowering shrub, in the birds that flew overhead, or the strange animals that ever and again crossed their path, about each and all of

which his retainer had information to offer, the time did not hang heavily on hand. They halted towards evening before a spacious enclosure, having passed through which, they came upon a roomy cottage, surrounded by a trim orchard, and backed up by farm buildings.

'Here's Badajos, Mr. Wilfred,' said his guide. 'And a better kept place there ain't in the whole country side.'

'Welcome to Badajos, Mr. Effingham,' said the proprietor. 'William, take this gentleman's horse; you know your way, Dick. We'll defer business till the morning. I have had the cattle yarded, ready for drafting; to-morrow you can choose the nucleus of a good herd. I shall be proud to put you in the way of cattle-farming in the only true way to succeed—by commencing with females of the right kind.'

As Wilfred followed his entertainer into the house, he felt unaffectedly surprised at the appearance of elegance mingled with comfort which characterised the establishment. The rooms were not large, but arranged with an attention of detail which he had not expected to find in a bush dwelling. The furniture was artistically disposed. Books and periodicals lay around. High-class engravings, with a few oil-paintings, which recalled Wilfred Effingham's past life, hung on the walls. Couches and lounges, of modern fashion, looked inviting, while a Broadwood piano stood in the corner of the drawing-room, into which he followed his host.

'I am a bachelor, more's the pity,' said Mr. O'Desmond; 'but there's no law against a little comfort in the wilderness. Will you take some refreshment now? Or would you like to be shown to your room?'

Wilfred accepted the latter proposal. In a very comfortable chamber he proceeded to divest himself of the traces of the road, after a leisurely and satisfactory fashion. He had barely regained the drawing-room, when a gong sounded with a melodiously reminiscent clang.

The dinner was after the fashion of civilised man. Soup and fish, fresh from a neighbouring stream, with meritorious entrées and entremets, showed skill beyond that of an ordinary domestic. While the host, who had sufficiently altered his attire for comfort, without committing the *bêtise* of out-dressing a guest, as he recommended a dry sherry, or passed the undeniable claret, seemed an embodied souvenir

of London, Paris, Vienna, of that world of fortune and fashion which Wilfred was vowed to forsake for ever. Next morning the sun and Mr. W. Effingham arose simultaneously. Dick Evans had anticipated both, and was standing at ease near the stable.

'This place is worth looking at, sir. You don't see nothing to speak of out of order—tidy as a barrack-yard.'

Wonderfully trim and orderly was the appearance of all things. The enclosure referred to was neatly gravelled, and showed not a vagrant straw. The garden was dug, raked, and pruned into orderly perfection. The servants' quarters, masked by a climber-covered trellis, were ornamental and unostentatious. The dog-kennels, tenanted by pointers, greyhounds, collies, and terriers, were snug and spacious. The stables were as neat as those of a London dealer. It was a show establishment.

'Mr. O'Desmond's servants must be attached to him, to work so well,' said Wilfred.

'Humph!' replied the veteran, 'he makes 'em toe the line pretty smart, and quite right too,' he added, with a grim setting of his under jaw. 'He was in the colony afore there was many free men in it. Shall we walk down to the milking-yard, sir?'

The full-uddered shorthorn cows, with their fragrant breath and mild countenances, having been admired in their clean, paved milking-yard, a return was made towards the cottage. As they neared the garden, O'Desmond rode briskly up to the stable door, and dismounting, threw the reins to a groom, who stood ready as a sentinel.

'The top of the morning to you, Mr. Effingham; I trust you slept well? I have had a canter of a few miles, which will give me an appetite for breakfast. I rode over to the drafting-yards, to make sure that the cattle were there, according to orders. Everything will be in readiness, so that you can drive easily to Warbrok to-night. You can manage that, Dick, can you not?'

'Easy enough, if you'll send a boy with us half-way, Mr. O'Desmond,' replied Dick. 'You see, sir, Mr. Effingham's rather new to cattle-driving, and if the young heifers was to break back, we might lose some of them.'

Quite right, Dick; you are always right where stock are

concerned—that is, the driving of them,' he added. 'I look to you to stay with Mr. Effingham till his dairy herd is established. I shall then have the pleasure of adding his name to that of the many gentlemen in this district whose fortunes I have helped to make.'

'Quite true, sir,' assented Dick heartily. 'The Camden sheep and the Badajos cattle and horses are known all over the country by them as are judges. But you don't want me to be praising on 'em up—they speak for themselves.'

Breakfast over, as faultless a repast as had been the dinner, it became apparent that Mr. O'Desmond held punctuality nearly in as high esteem as comfort. His groom stood ready in the yard with his own and Wilfred's horses saddled, the shining thorough-bred, which he called his hackney, offering a strong contrast to the unkempt though well-conditioned animal which his guest bestrode.

As they rode briskly along the winding forest track, Wilfred, observing the quality of his host's hackney, the silver brightness of his bit and stirrup-irons, the correctness of his general turn-out, remembering also the completeness of the establishment and the character of the hospitality he had enjoyed, doubted within himself whether, in course of time, the owner of Warbrok Chase might ever attain to such a pinnacle of colonial prosperity.

'How incredible this would all appear to some of my English friends!' he thought. 'I can hardly describe it without the fear of being supposed to exaggerate.'

'Here we are,' said O'Desmond, reining up, and dismounting at a substantial stock-yard, while a lad instantly approached and took his horse. 'I have ordered the heifers and young cows to be placed in this yard. We can run them through before you. You can make your choice, and reject any animals below the average.'

'They look rather confused at present,' answered Wilfred; 'but I suppose Dick here understands how to separate them.'

'I'll manage that, never you fear, sir—that is, if you and Mr. O'Desmond have settled about the price.'

'I may state now,' remarked that gentleman, 'that the price, four pounds per head, mentioned to me on your account by your agent is a liberal one, as markets go. I shall endeavour to give you value in kind.'

'It's a good price,' asserted Dick; 'but Mr. O'Desmond's cattle are cheaper at four pounds all round than many another man's about here at fifty shillings. If he lets me turn back any beast I don't fancy, we'll take away the primest lot of cattle to begin a dairy with as has travelled the line for years.'

'I will give you my general idea of the sort of cattle I prefer,' said Wilfred, not minded to commence by leaving the *whole* management in any servant's hands, 'then you can select such as appear to answer the description.'

'All right, sir,' quoth Mr. Evans, mounting the fence. 'I suppose you want 'em large-framed cattle, good colours, looking as if they'd run to milk and not to beef, not under three, and not more than five year old, and putty quiet in their looks and ways.'

'That is exactly the substance of what I was going to say to you,' said Wilfred, with some surprise. 'It will save me the trouble of explaining.'

'We may as well begin, sir,' said Dick, addressing himself to the proprietor. Then, in quite another tone, 'Open the rails, boys; look sharp, and let 'em into the drafting-yards.'

The cattle were driven through a succession of yards after such a fashion that Wilfred was enabled to perceive how the right of choice could be exercised. By the time the operation was concluded he felt himself to be inducted into the art and mystery of 'drafting.' Also, he respected himself as having appreciably helped to select and separate the one hundred prepossessing-looking kine which now stood in a separate yard, recognised as his property.

'You will have no reason to be dissatisfied with your choice,' said O'Desmond. 'They look a nice lot. I always brand any cattle before they leave my yard. You will not object to a numeral being put on them before they go? It will assist in their identification in case of any coming back.'

'Coming back!—come back twenty miles?' queried Wilfred, with amazement. 'How could they get back such a distance?'

'Just as you would—by walking it, and a hundred to the back of that. So I think, say, No. I. brand—they are A1 certainly—will be a prudent precaution.'

'Couldn't do a better thing,' assented Dick. 'We'll brand

'em again when we go home, sir; but if we lost 'em anyway near the place, they'd be all here before you could say Jack Robinson.'

A fire was quickly lighted, the iron brands were heated, the cows driven by a score at a time into a narrow yard, and for the first time in his life Wilfred saw the red-hot iron applied to the hide of the live animal. The pain, like much evil in this world, if intense, was brief; the cows cringed and showed disapproval, but soon appeared to forget. The morning was not far advanced when Wilfred Effingham found himself riding behind a drove, or 'mob' (as Dick phrased it), *of his own cattle.*

'There goes the best lot of heifers this day in the country,' said the old man, 'let the others be where they may. Mr. O'Desmond's a rare man for givin' you a good beast if you give him a fair price; you may trust him like yourself, but he's a hard man and bitter enough if anybody tries to take advantage of him.'

'And quite right too, Dick. I take Mr. O'Desmond to be a most honourable man, with whom I shouldn't care to come to cross purposes.'

'No man ever did much good that tried that game, sir. He's a bad man to get on the wrong side of.'

CHAPTER V

'CALLED ON BY THE COUNTY'

WHEN the important drove reached Warbrok, great was the excitement. Wilfred's absence was the loss of Hamlet from the play; his return the signal for joy and congratulation. The little commonwealth was visibly agitated as the tired cattle trailed along the track to the stock-yard, with Dick sitting bolt upright in his saddle behind them, and Wilfred essaying to crack the inconveniently long whip provided for him.

The girls made their appearance upon the verandah; Andrew looked forth as interested, yet under protest. Guy walked behind, and much admired the vast number and imposing appearance of the herd; while Captain and Mrs. Effingham stood arm in arm at a safe distance appreciating the prowess of their first-born.

'Now, sir,' quoth the ready Dick, 'we'll put 'em in the yard and make 'em safe to-night; to-morrow, some one will have to tail 'em.'

'Tail them?' said Wilfred. 'Some of their ears have been scolloped, I see; but surely it is not necessary to cut their tails in a hot climate like this?'

'S'cuse me, sir,' said Dick respectfully, 'I wouldn't put the knife to them for pounds; "tailing" means shepherdin'.'

'And what does "shepherding" mean? I thought shepherds were only for sheep?'

'Well, sir, I never heerd talk of shepherdin' at home, but it's a currency word for follerin' anything that close, right agin' their tails, that a shepherd couldn't be more careful with his sheep; so we talk of shepherdin' a s'picious c'rakter,

or a lot of stock, or a man that's tossicated with notes stickin' out of his pocket, or a young woman, or anything that wants lookin' after very partickler.'

'Now I understand,' said Wilfred. 'It's not a bad word, and might be used in serious matters.'

'No mistake about that, sir. Now the yard's finished off and topped up, we'll soon be able to make a start with the dairy. There'll be half-a-dozen calves within the week, and more afore the month's out. There's nothin' breaks in cows to stop like their young calves; you'll soon see 'em hanging about the yard as if they'd been bred here, 'specially as the feed is so forrard. There's no mistake, a myst season do make everything go pleasant.'

When the cattle were in the yard, and the slip rails made safe by having spare posts put across them, Wilfred unsaddled his provisional mount and walked into the house in a satisfactory mental condition.

'So, behold you of return!' quoted Rosamond, running to meet him, and marching him triumphantly into the dining-room, where all was ready for tea. 'The time has been rather long. Papa has been walking about, not knowing exactly what to do, or leave undone; Guy shooting, not over-successfully. The most steadily employed member of the household, and the happiest, I suppose, has been Andrew, digging without intermission the whole time.'

'I wish we could dig too, or have some employment found for us,' said Annabel; 'girls are shamefully unprovided with real work, except stocking-mending. Jeanie won't let us do anything in the kitchen, and really, that is the only place where there is any fun. The house is so large, and echoing at night when the wind blows. And only think, we found the mark of a pistol bullet in the dining-room wall at one end, and there is another in the ceiling!'

'How do you know it was a pistol shot?' inquired Wilfred. 'Some one threw a salt-cellar at the butler in the good old times.'

'Perhaps it was fired in the good old times; perhaps it killed some one—how horrible! Perhaps he was carried out through the passage. But we know it was a shot, because Guy poked about and found the bullet flattened out.'

'Well, we must ask Evans; very likely old Colonel

Warleigh fired pistols in his mad fits. He used to sit, they say, night after night, drinking and cursing by himself after his wife died and his sons left him. No one dared go near him when his pistols were loaded. But we need not think of these things now, Annabel. He is dead and gone, and his sons are not in this part of the country. So I see you have had flower-beds made while I was away. I declare the wistaria and bignonia are breaking into flower. How gorgeous they will look!'

'Yes, mamma said she could not exist without flowers any longer, so we persuaded Andrew, much against his will, —for he said "he was just fair harassed wi' thae early potatoes,"—to dig these borders. Guy helped us to transplant and sow seeds, so we shall have flowers of our own once more.'

'We shall have everything of our own in a few years if we are patient,' said Wilfred; 'and you damsels don't want trips to watering-places, and so on. This life is better than Boulogne, or the Channel Islands, though it may be a trifle lonely.'

'Boulogne! A thousandfold,' said Rosamond. 'Here we have life and hope. Those poor families we used to see there looked liked ghosts and apparitions of their old selves. You remember watching them walking down drearily to see the packet come in—the girls dowdy or shabby, the old people hopeless and apathetic, the sons so idle and lounging? I shudder when I think how near we were to such horrors ourselves. The very air of Australia seems to give one fresh life. Can anything be finer than this sunset?'

In truth, the scene upon which her eyes rested might have cheered a sadder heart than that of the high-hearted maiden who now, with her arm upon her brother's shoulder, directed his gaze to the far empurpled hills, merging their violet cloud masses and orange-gold tints in the darkening eve. The green pastures, relieved by clumps of heavy-foliaged trees, glowed emerald bright against the dark-browed mountain spur. The dying sun-rays fell in fire-flakes of burning gold on the mirrored silver of the lake. Wrapped in soft tremulous mist lay the hills upon the farther shore, vast with the subtle effect of limitless distance. At such times one could dream with the faith of older days—that Earth, the

universal mother, loved her children, and breathed forth in growth of herb and flower her smiling welcome.

That night, as the Effinghams sat around their table, an unconscious feeling of thankfulness swelled each heart. The parents saw assurance of a well-provided suitable home for the little troop, the probable disbanding of which had cost such sad forebodings. The sons, strong in the faith of youth, saw a future of adventure, well-rewarded labour, perhaps brilliant success. The girls felt that their lives would not be henceforth deprived of the social intercourse which had once been an ordinary condition of existence.

'How did you fare at Mr. O'Desmond's, my son? What kind of an establishment does he keep?' inquired Mrs. Effingham.

'You will all be rather astonished,' answered Wilfred mysteriously. 'What should you think, Annabel? You are a good hand at guessing.'

'Let me think. He is very aristocratic and dignified, yet he might live in a hut. Men are so independent of rooms or houses, almost of looking-glasses. Now a woman in a poky little place always shows it in her dress. I should say he lives in a comfortable cottage, and has everything very complete.'

'And you would be right. We shall have to mind our manners and dinners when he comes again. He lives like a club bachelor, and is as well lodged as—let us say—a land steward on an absentee nobleman's estate.'

'You must be romancing, Wilfred,' said Beatrice. 'Where could he get the luxuries that such a great man as you have described could procure? What a wonderful difference a few thousand miles makes! We think ourselves not so much worse, essentially, than we were in England; but we must be deteriorating.'

'Don't talk nonsense, my dear Beatrice,' said Rosamond. 'Is it not a little vulgar to attach so much weight to externals? As long as we are doing our duty, why should there be any deterioration? It will be our own fault if we adopt a lower level of manners.'

'Oh, but how can any one expect to be the same in colonial society?' exclaimed Annabel. 'See how insignificant even the "best people" are out here. Why, I was reading

yesterday about a "country baronet," and even a "well-meaning, unfashionable countess," being looked down upon —positively laughed at—in England. Now think what tremendous potentates they would be out here! I'm sure that proves what I say.'

'Your propositions and proofs are worthy of one another, my dear,' said Wilfred. 'But as to society, I shan't be sorry when more of our neighbours call.'

'Now that the house is fit to receive them I shall be pleased, my dear son, to see the people of the land. I am sure I hope there are some nice ones.'

Wilfred rose early next morning to indulge himself with another look at the new cattle. He was only just in time, as Dick had breakfasted, caught his horse, and was about to let out the imprisoned drove.

'I'll tail 'em for the first few days, sir,' he said, 'till I give 'em the way of camping under them big trees near the little swamp. It will make a first-rate camp for 'em, and learn 'em to run handy to the place. After that we must get some sort of a lad to foller 'em. It won't pay you to keep me at blackfellow's work.'

'What's that?' inquired Wilfred.

'Why, simple work like this, that any black boy could do, if he didn't give his mind to 'possums. Besides, we wants a horse-yard, and a bit of a paddock, and another field cleared, to plough for next year.'

'That seems a good deal of work to carry on, Richard. Won't it take more hands? Remember, we must go economically to work. My father is by no means a rich man.'

'That's quite right, sir; no one should run themselves out of pocket, high or low. But if we had some one to go with these cows till the calves come, and that won't be long, you and I could do what work I've chalked out.'

'Why should not Guy "tail" the cows, as you call it?' suggested Wilfred, pleased with the idea that they would be able to provide labour from their own community. 'It would do him no harm.'

'Perhaps the young gentleman mightn't like it,' said Dick, with deep respect. 'It's dull work, every day, like.'

'Oh, he *must* like it!' decided Wilfred, with the despotic elder brother tone. 'We have come out here to work, and

he must take his share. He may find it dull for a time; but he can shoot a little and amuse himself, as long as he doesn't come home without them, like Little Bo-peep. What would a boy cost?'

'About six or eight shillings a week, and his rations, sir, which would come to as much again. But the young master needn't stay out after four o'clock.'

'Then we make a saving at once of say sixteen shillings a week. Guy never earned so much in his life before. He will be quite proud of his value in the labour market. You and I can begin splitting and fencing at once.'

'But we shall want some more cattle, sir,' suggested Dick

'More cattle!' said Wilfred in amazement, to whom a hundred head was an awe-striking number. 'What for?'

'Why, to eat! It don't do to buy meat every time you want a roast or a steak. Cheapest to kill your own. If we was to buy a mob of common cattle, they'd cost nothing to speak of; the bullocks soon fatten, and the cows would breed you up a fair mixed herd in no time.'

'Well, but we have these cattle you have just let out,' pleaded Wilfred, looking admiringly at the red, white, and roan shorthorn crosses, which, spreading over the rich meadow, were feeding quietly, as if reared there.

'Them's all very well, sir; but it'll be years before you kill a bullock out of that lot; they've got to come, all in good time. But the quiet steers, and the worst of the cows, in a mixed herd, will be fat before you can look round, in a season like this, and your beef won't cost you above a penny a pound.'

It was decided that Guy was to 'tail' or herd the new cows at present. Upon this duty being named to him, he made no objection—rather seemed to like it.

'I suppose as long as I don't lose them I can do anything I like,' he said; 'hunt 'possums, shoot, ferret out ferns for Rosamond, or even read.'

'The more you lets the cattle alone the better, Mr. Guy,' said Dick. 'As long as they don't sneak away from you, you can't take it too easy. There's fine feed all roads now, and after the first hour or two they'll fill theirselves and lie down like working bullocks. But you'll want a horse.'

'That I shall,' said the boy, beginning to take up the

fashions of the bush, and to rebel at the idea of going on foot, as if mankind was a species of centaur.

'Must have more horses too, sir,' announced Dick, with a calm air of ask and have.

'How many?' returned Wilfred uncomplyingly; 'it seems we shall want more horses—we haven't any, certainly —more cattle, more tillage, more yards, more paddocks; it will soon come to wanting more money, and where to get *that* I don't know.'

'Horses are dirt cheap, sir, just now, and can't be done without, nohow. You'll want a cob for the Captain to potter about on, a couple of hacks for yourself, one apiece for Mr. Guy and the young ladies—they'd like a canter now and then afore Christmas. I hear Mick Donnelly's selling off, to clear out for Monaro. You couldn't do better than ride over and see his lot; they'll be pretty sure to live on our grass, if any of the neighbours gets 'em, and you may as well have that profit out of 'em yourself.'

The conversation having come to an end, Mr. Evans was about to move after his cattle, now indulging in a pretty wide spread, when a horseman joining them, greeted Wilfred.

'Good-morning, sir,' said the stranger, with loud, peculiar, but not unpleasant voice, having a note of culture too. 'Glad to make your acquaintance; Mr. Effingham, I believe? We're neighbours, on the south, about ten miles from Benmohr. You haven't seen a chestnut pony about, branded 2C? He used to run here in Hunt's time. Why, hang me! if he isn't coming up to show himself!'

The chestnut pony which had borne Wilfred so successfully in the journey for the new cattle now trotted up, having followed Evans's mare, to which animal he had attached himself, after the manner of horses, prone to contract sudden friendships.

Wilfred, about to disclaim any knowledge of the strange gentleman's chestnut, not dreaming that the estray which had come in so handily could be his property, and as yet not given to reading at a glance 2C or other hieroglyph, felt rather nonplussed, more especially when he noticed the stranger's eye attracted to the saddle-mark on the pony's fat back.

'I must confess to having ridden your horse, if he be so, a short journey. We were not aware of his ownership, and I had no horse of my own. I trust you will forgive the liberty.'

'He *has* rather nice paces. How did you like him?' inquired the stranger urbanely, much as if he had a favour conferred upon him. 'I'll run him into the yard now with your permission, and lead him home.'

'Pray come in, and allow me to introduce you to my people,' said Wilfred, satisfied, from the stranger's bearing, that he was a desirable acquaintance. 'With the exception of Mr. O'Desmond, from whom I bought these cattle, we have not seen a neighbour yet.'

'Know them all in time,' said the stranger; 'no great shakes, some of them, when you *do* know them. My name's Churbett, by the bye—Fred Churbett, of The Oaks; cattle station on Banksia Creek, used to be called She-oak Flat—had to change it. Nice cattle O'Desmond let you have; got good stock, but makes you pay for them.'

'How you have improved the old place!' continued Mr. Churbett, as they approached the house. 'Who would believe that so much could have been made of it? Never saw it in the palmy days of Colonel Warleigh, though. Seems to have run in the military line of ownership. The old boy kept up great state. Four-in-hand always to Yass, they say. Coachman, butler, lots of servants—convicts, of course. Awful temper; cursed freely, drank ditto. Sons not behindhand, improved upon the paternal sins—gambling, horse-racing, Old Harry generally. Had to clear out and sell. Great pull for the district having a family straight from "home" settled in it.'

'I trust the advantage will be mutual,' said Wilfred. 'We hope to be neighbourly when we are quite settled. But you will understand that it has taken us a little time to shake down.'

'Thought of that,' said Mr. Churbett, 'or should have had the pleasure of calling before. Trotted over to look up master "Traveller" for the muster, or should have waited another week.'

Mr. Churbett's horses having been disposed of, he was duly introduced. He proved if anything a greater success

than Mr. O'Desmond. He was musical, and the sight of the piano immediately brought up talk about the last opera he had heard in London. He was also a great reader, and after touching upon half a score of authors, promised to bring over a new book which he had just got up from town.

'Really,' said Annabel innocently, 'this is a surprise. I never dreamed of getting a new book in the bush. Why, it only came out just before we left. I was longing to read it; but, of course, we were too miserable and worried. How can it have got here so quickly?'

'Just the same way that we did, I suppose,' said Beatrice —'in a ship. You forget the time that has passed since we landed.'

'Still, it is a pleasant surprise. I shouldn't wonder, perhaps we may get some new music soon. But I should as soon have thought of a book-club in the moon.'

'Talking of book-clubs,' said Churbett, 'we are trying to get up one; I hope you will join. With twelve members, and a moderate subscription, we can import a very fair lot of books every year. A brother of mine in London can choose them for us; I am to be librarian. The books are divided into sets, which each subscriber sends on in turn.'

Annabel clapped her hands. 'How delightful! Wilfred, of course, will join. Fancy, dear, *clean* new books every month. Really, life is becoming quite intoxicating, and I thought we should die of dulness and ennui.'

'No; did you, though?' echoed Mr. Churbett compassionately. 'I confess to feeling inclined to cry when I came up to Murson Creek and saw the hut I was to live in for the first year. But one's feelings get wonderfully altered after a while.'

'And are you *quite* resigned, that is contented, to give up operas and picture galleries, clubs and travel, all the pleasant parts of English life?' asked Rosamond.

'It *was* hard at first, Miss Effingham; but here I have independence, with the prospect of a fortune. In England such was not the case, particularly the independence. Operas and other memories recall a fairy realm which I may yet re-enter. Meantime, I ride about all day, work now and then, smoke and read at night, and if not exactly happy, am decently cheerful.'

'What the world calls pleasure you never see, I suppose?' said Beatrice philosophically.

'Do we not? I forgot one compensation in our virtuous, self-denying lives. Once a year, at least, we have races in Yass, which is our metropolis. Then we all meet together, as a solemn, social obligation. Pilgrimage to Mecca, and so on. Very few true believers absent. Balls, picnics, any amount of dancing, flirtation, what not. Enough to last for the rest of the year. After a week or two we go home sorrowfully, staying at each other's houses on the way, to let down the excitement by degrees.'

'Where do the ladies come from?' asked Annabel. 'I suppose there are very few?'

'Very few!' said Mr. Churbett in tones of horror. '*Ever* so many. Is it possible you have never heard, even in Europe, of the beautiful Miss Christabel Rockley, the fascinating Mrs. Snowden, the talented Mrs. Porchester? Ladies! They abound, or how should we remain civilised? Yass is well known to be the home of all the graces. Could O'Desmond retain his *grand seigneur* air but for the advantage of refined association? I wish I could take you round, Miss Effingham, on an introductory tour. What a book we could write of our experiences!—"Travels and Sketches in the Upper Strata of the Social System of the Yass District, by Miss Annabel Effingham, illustrated by F. Churbett, F.R.Y.A.S.S., Fellow of the Royal Yass Analytical Squatting Society," reads well.'

'Quite delicious,' said Annabel. 'But everything that is nice is improper, so, of course, I shouldn't be let go. Not even Rosamond, who is prudence personified. I'm afraid there is no more liberty for poor women in a new country than an old one. That *is* the bell—I was sure of it. Mr. Churbett, allow me to invite you to dinner—an early one, which is about the extent of my privileges.'

Mr. Churbett accepted the invitation, as he no doubt would have acceded to any proposition emanating from the speaker even less manifestly beneficial. He kept the whole party amused, and lingered until he declared he should have to gallop Grey Surrey all the way home to get there before dark.

'He's like me,' he explained, upon being charged with

cruelty; 'he only does a day's work now and then, and he doesn't mind it when it does come.'

Resisting all invitation to stop for the night, on the plea that the effort necessary in his case must be made some time and might as well be undergone now, he departed in the odour of high consideration, if not of sanctity.

In order that no opportunities might be lost, Wilfred commenced the habit of rising at dawn and joining Dick at the stock-yard, where the old man had initiated a dairy, with the aid of the few cows of the O'Desmond brand which had produced calves. Here he was attended by Andrew, who sturdily proceeded to take his share of the work, in spite of Dick's sarcastic attitude. He evidently considered the dairy to be his province, and regarded Andrew as an interloper.

'Na, na, Maister Wilfred,' said Andrew, 'I hae been acquent in my time wi' a' manner o' kye, and had a collie following me these thretty years. It's no because we're in a new land that I'm to turn my back on ilka occupa-ation that will bring in profit to the laird and his bairns. Jeanie can mak' as sweet butter as ever a gudewife in Lothian, and we hae to depend maistly on the butter-keggies, for what I see.'

'You'll find that garden of yours, when the weeds come up, quite enough for one, I'm thinking. There's enough of us here, if Mr. Wilfred takes to it kind, as he seems to do. But if you're such a dab hand at milking, you can tek that red cow that's come in this morning.'

'And a gra-and show o' milk she has,' quoth Andrew, 'maist unco-omon!'

Dick commenced, with a stolid expression, to arrange the slip-rails, which apparently took time to adjust. Andrew, meanwhile, proud of the opportunity of exhibiting his familiarity with the art and science of milking, moved the red cow into one of the bails, or stalls, in which cows are ordinarily milked in Australia.

Sitting upon a three-legged stool, he commenced his ancient and classical task. He had succeeded in, perhaps, drawing a pint from the over-full udder of the red cow aforesaid, when she suddenly raised her hind leg and caught him with such emphasis that man and milk, pail and stool, went clattering down into the corner of the yard.

'Gude save us!' exclaimed Andrew, picking himself up,

and rubbing his person, while he collected all that was recoverable of the scattered properties. 'What garred the fell beastie act sae daft-like. I hae milket a hunner coos, and ne'er was whummled like yon.'

'Perhaps they was Scotch cows, and understood your talk, Mr. Cargill,' said Dick, with great politeness, covering a grim enjoyment; 'but in this country we mostly *leg-ropes* cows when we bail 'em up, for fear of accidents.'

'Weel, I winna say that these queys, being brocht up in a mair savage fashion than in bonnie Scotland, wadna need head and heel fastenings. But, ma certie, they would glower in my part of the country, gin ye tied a coo's leg like a thrawn ox at the smithy.'

'I suppose "we must do at Rome, etc.," and all the rest of it, Andrew,' said Wilfred. 'Here, Dick, make a beginning with your cow, and Andrew and I will put a leg-rope on this one. Never too late to mend. I'll back Andrew to hold his own yet in the milking-yard, or anywhere else.'

Old Dick, having satisfied his grudge by compassing the downfall of Andrew, whom he had shrewdly guessed never to have been accustomed to a leg-rope, condescended to instruct Wilfred in the proper way to knot it. The cows were eventually milked *secundum artem*, and when the full buckets, foaming over with creamy fluid, stood on a bench outside the yard, Wilfred saw with distinct gratification the first dividend from the cattle investment.

'We must calculate now, Andrew,' he said, as they walked over to the house, 'how much butter can be made from the milk of these cows. It is a small matter, of course; but multiplied by ten—as we shall have at least fifty cows in milk, Dick says, before Christmas—it will not be so bad.'

'After conseederin' the matter maist carefully,' said Andrew, 'I am free to give it as ma deleeberate opeenion that gin the pasture keeps aye green and plenteous we may mak' baith butter and cheese o' the best quality. As to price, I canna yet say, havin' nae knowledge o' the mairkets.'

'Well, we have made a beginning, Andrew, and that is a great matter. If we can only pay current expenses, without employing more hands, we shall be doing well, I consider.'

'We must work gey and close at the first gang aff, Maister

Wilfred, and then dinna ye fear. Wi' the Lord's blessing, we'll be spared to set up our horn on high, as weel as thae prood Amalekites, that have had the first grip o' this gra-and Canaan. I was doon yestreen and lookit at the field o' victual—the paddock, as yon auld carle ca's it. It's maist promising—forbye ordinar'—maist unco-omon.'

Among the list of indispensable investments which Dick Evans had urged upon Wilfred, but which he had not at present thought it necessary to undertake, were another lot of cattle, a dozen horses (more or less), and some kind of taxed cart, or light vehicle. Apparently these would be advantageous and profitable, but Wilfred had determined to be most sparing in all outlay, lest the reserve fund of the family should come to a premature end.

On this day it seemed that the advanced guard of the neighbouring gentry had commenced to lay formal siege to Warbrok Chase. On his return to the house in the afternoon, Wilfred descried two good-looking horses hanging up to the garden fence, and upon entering the sitting-room beheld their owners in amicable converse with his mother and sisters. He was promptly introduced to Mr. Argyll and Mr. Charles Hamilton. Both men were well, even fashionably dressed, and bore about them the nameless air which stamps the holder of a degree in the university of society.

'We should have called before,' said Mr. Argyll, a tall fair-haired man, whose quick glancing blue eye and mobile features betrayed natural impetuosity, kept under by training; 'but my partner here is such an awfully hard-working fellow, that he would not quit the engineering with which he was busied, to visit the Queen of Sheba, if she had just settled in the neighbourhood.'

'I was not aware,' said Mr. Hamilton coolly, and with an air of settled conviction upon his regular and handsome features, 'of the extent of my sacrifice to duty. I may venture to assure Mrs. Effingham that my neighbourly duties for the future will not be neglected.'

'I hope not,' said Mrs. Effingham; 'for, now that the excitement of settling in such a very different world has passed away, we begin to feel rather lonely — may I say dull?'

'No, mamma,' said Rosamond, 'you must not say that.

We are all so fully occupied, from morning to dusk, that we have no time to be dull.'

'Oh, but we cannot get on without society,' remarked Annabel. 'I feel in the highest spirits as long as there is so much to do, that there is no time for thinking; indeed, I hate to have a moment to myself. But in the afternoons, when papa and the boys are out, I begin to realise our solitary position, and the feeling becomes oppressive.'

'Very naturally too,' said Mr. Argyll. 'But as yet you have no idea of the social resources which you will be able to draw upon when you are acquainted with everybody.'

'And who is everybody?' asked Beatrice. 'How can we be sociable if people don't come to see us? Suppose you tell us who are the nice people of the district, and we shall be able to enjoy them in anticipation.'

'You will see most of them within the month; but I shrink from describing them. Charles, you are afraid of nobody, suppose you give us a *catalogue raisonné*.'

'Certainly, if Miss Effingham wishes it,' assented Mr. Hamilton, who had the imperturbable look which goes with a temperament difficult to surprise or intimidate. 'I shall have great pleasure in trotting out our friends for her information. We have been here only three years, so in case of mistakes you must be considerate.'

'Oh, we shall be most discreet,' said Annabel; 'besides, we have no acquaintance yet to chatter to—that's the best guarantee for prudence.'

'I think I may take your solemn affirmation not to betray me,' said Mr. Hamilton, looking admiringly into Annabel's lovely eyes, 'and even then I would face the risk. First, there is Captain Snowden with his wife. He was in the navy, I think; he has rather more of the sailor about him than—what shall I say?—the courtier, though he can be very agreeable when he likes. Madame is extremely lady-like, clever, travelled, what not. You must see her and judge for yourself.'

'Are there any more ladies?' asked Rosamond. 'They possess an absorbing interest for us.'

'Ever so many more,' laughed Hamilton. 'Mrs. Porchester, who is rather a "blue"; Mrs. Egremont, who is a beauty; the Misses Carter, who are good-nature itself. The

others, I think, you must find out by degrees. In Yass there are some very nice families, particularly that of Mr. Rockley. He is the leading merchant in these parts, and rules like a benevolent despot. His wife is hospitable and amiable beyond compare; his daughter, Miss Christabel, dangerously beautiful. I *must* leave something to the imagination.'

'I assure you we are most grateful to you as it is,' said Mrs. Effingham. 'It is really encouraging to find that there are so many charming people in the neighbourhood. We should hardly consider them in the same county at home; but here they don't seem to mind riding any distance.'

'I am mistaken,' said Hamilton, 'if you do not find people riding wonderful distances to visit Warbrok. We are less than twenty miles away, I am thankful to say, so you will see us as often as you care for. By the way,' turning to Wilfred, 'did I hear you say you were going to Donnelly's sale? If you buy stock there, you had better stay a night at Benmohr on your return. It is just a fair stage.'

'Thanks. I shall be most happy. Do you think it a good idea to invest at Donnelly's?'

'If I were in your place I should buy all his cattle and a few horses. They can't fail to be a profitable purchase, as you seem to have any amount of grass. But we must be going. We shall expect you at Benmohr the day after the sale. Mrs. Effingham, I shall do myself the honour of another visit, after you have been able to verify my portraitures.'

'What gentlemanlike young men!' said Mrs. Effingham, when the guests were fairly away. 'I am so sorry that your papa was out. He would have been so pleased. Mr. Argyll seems so clever, and Mr. Hamilton is very handsome—both wonderfully well dressed for the bush.'

'I should say Mr. Argyll was disposed to be sarcastic,' said Rosamond; 'and I am mistaken if he has not a fierce temper. He told us he was a Highlander, which accounts for it.'

'Mr. Hamilton is one of the nicest-looking men I have seen for a long time,' said Annabel; 'what splendid eyes he has! He is very particular about his gloves too; gives time and reflection to his toilet, I should say.'

'I have heard Dick say that he is the hardest-working squatter in the district,' said Wilfred. 'He is devoted to

ploughing, digging, navvy-work, horse-breaking—"all manner of slavery," as Dick says.'

'Who would have thought it!' exclaimed Mrs. Effingham in tones of astonishment. 'From his appearance I should have thought that he was afraid to soil those white hands of his.'

'The best-dressed people are not the most backward at work or fighting,' said Wilfred.

'But how *can* he keep his hands white,' inquired Annabel with a great appearance of interest, 'if he really works like a labourer?'

'Perhaps he works in gloves; a man can get through a great deal of work in a pair of old riding-gloves, and his hands be never the worse. There is something about those two men that I like extremely. Mr. Argyll puts me in mind of Fergus M'Ivor with that fiery glance; he looks as if he had a savage temper, well held in.'

'They are both very nice, and I hope you will make real friends of them, Wilfred,' said Mrs. Effingham. 'Might I also suggest that, as it is evidently practicable to dress like a gentleman and work hard, a certain young man should be more careful of his appearance?'

'I deserve that, I know, old lady,' said her son laughingly; 'but really there is a temptation in the wilderness to costume a little. I promise you to amend.'

'Our circle of acquaintance is expanding,' said Beatrice; 'certainly it has the charm of variety. Mr. O'Desmond is Irish, Mr. Churbett from London, our last visitors Scots—one Highland, one Lowland. All differing among themselves too. I am sure we shall be fully occupied; it will be a task of some delicacy *tenir de salon*, if we ever have them here at a party.'

'A party!' said Mrs. Effingham; 'don't think of it for *years* to come, child. It would be impossible, inappropriate in every way.'

'But there's no harm, mamma, surely, in *thinking* of it,' pleaded Annabel. 'It encourages one to keep alive, if nothing else.'

CHAPTER VI

AN AUSTRALIAN YEOMAN

A WEEK of laborious work preceded the day when circumstances permitted Wilfred and his serving-man to ride forth for the purpose of attending the sale of Mr. Michael Donnelly's stock and effects. Formerly known as 'Willoughby's Mick,' he had, during an unpretending career as stock-rider for that gentleman, accumulated a small herd of cattle and horses, with which to commence life on a grazing farm near Yass. Here, by exercise of the strictest economy as to personal expenses, as well as from the natural increase of stock, he had, during a residence of a dozen years, amassed a considerable property. Yet on his holding there was but scant evidence of toil or contrivance. A few straggling peach trees represented the garden. The bark-roofed slab hut which he found when he came had sufficed for the lodging of himself and wife, with nearly a dozen children. The fences, not originally good, were now ruinous. The fields, suffered to go out of cultivation, lay fallow and unsightly, only half-cleared of tree-stumps. The dress of this honest yeoman had altered for the worse since the hard-riding days of 'Willoughby's Mick.' The healthy boys and girls were more or less ragged; the younger ones barefooted. The saddles and cart harness were patched with raw hide, or clumsily repaired. The cow-shed was rickety; the calves unsheltered. Yet with all this apparent decay and disorder, any one, judging from appearances, who had put down Michael Donnelly as an impoverished farmer, would have been egregiously deceived. His neighbours knew that his battered old cabbage-tree hat covered a head with an

unusual amount of brains. Uneducated and bush-bred, he possessed intuitive powers of calculation and forecast frequently denied to cultured individuals. Early in life he had appropriated the fact, that in this land of boundless pasturage, profitable up to a certain point, without the necessity of one *farthing* of expenditure, the multiplication of stock was possible to any conceivable extent. Once make a commencement with a few cows, and it was a man's own fault if he died without more cattle than he could count. Hadn't Johnny Shore begun that way? *Walked* over to Monaro with half-a-crown in his pocket. He saved his wages for a few years and got the needful start.

Become a capitalist, his instincts revolted against spending money needlessly, when every pound, often less, would buy a cow, which cow would turn into fifty head of cattle in a few years. 'What could a man do that would pay him half as well? Why employ labour that could be done without? It was all very well for Mr. Willoughby, who had raised his wages gradually from twenty pounds per annum and one ration. Mr. Willoughby was a gentleman with a big station, and threw his money about a bit; but why should he, Mick Donnelly, go keeping and feeding men to put in crops when farming didn't pay? Therefore his fields might lie fallow and go out of cultivation.'

His boys were getting big lumps of fellows, old enough to help brand and muster. The girls could milk, and break in the heifers, as well as all the men in the country. His wife could cook—there wasn't much of that; and wash—it didn't fatigue her; and sweep—that process was economised—as well as ever. Any kind of duds did for working people, as long as they went decent to chapel on Sundays. That they had always done and would do, please God. But all other occasions of spending money were wasteful and unnecessary.

The sole expenses, then, of this large family were in the purchase of flour, tea, sugar, and clothes, none of which articles came to an extravagant sum for the year. While the sales were steady and considerable. Mick and his sons drove many a lot of cattle, fat or store, to the neighbouring markets. The profits of the dairy in butter and bacon, the representatives of which latter product roamed in small herds around the place, paid all the household expenses twice over;

while the amount of his credit balance at the Bank of New Holland in Yass would have astonished many a tourist who watched Mick smoking on his stock-yard rails, or riding an unshod mare down the range after a mob of active cattle.

But now a more ambitious idea was evolved from the yeoman's slowly maturing, but accurate mental processes. He had been noting the relative scale of outlay and income of a neighbouring sheep-farmer. After certain cautious comparisons, he fixed the conclusion that, other things being equal, sheep would pay him better than cattle. He heard from an old comrade of the forced sale of a sheep station in the then half-explored, unstocked district of Monaro, lying between the Great Range and the Snowy River. His offer of cash, at a rate far from remunerative to the late owner, had been accepted.

That part of his plan settled, he sold his freehold to a neighbouring proprietor who was commencing to found an estate, receiving rather more than double his original purchase money. Stock being at a reasonable price, Donnelly determined to sell off the whole of his possessions, merely reserving his dray, team, and a sufficiency of saddle-horses for the family. His herd had become too numerous for the run. His boys and girls would make shepherds and shepherdesses for a while—by no means a picturesque occupation in Australia, but still profitable as of old. He would be enabled to continue independent of hired labour. He trusted to the duplication of stock to do the rest. Hence the clearing-off sale, which a number of farmers in the neighbourhood were likely to attend, and to which Wilfred and his chief servitor were at present wending their way.

On this occasion Wilfred had resisted the idea of mounting any of the strayed horses, still numerous upon the enticing pastures of Warbrok. Having unwittingly placed himself in a false position, he was resolved not to repeat the impropriety.

'Mr. Churbett had behaved most courteously,' he said; 'but it might have been otherwise. I was not aware that it was other than a colonial custom. There must be no more mistakes of this kind, Dick, or you and I shall quarrel. Go to one of the nearest farmers and see if you can hire me a decent hack.'

So Dick, though chafing at the over-delicacy which led his master to pay for a mount while available steeds were eating his grass, proceeded to obey orders, and shortly returned with a substantial half-bred, upon which Wilfred bestowed himself.

Dick Evans was always in good spirits at the prospect of a cruise in foreign parts. Mrs. Evans, on the other hand, was prone to dwell upon the unpleasant side of domestic matters. Her habit of mind had doubtless resulted in the philosophic calm with which her husband bore his frequent, and occasionally protracted, absences from the conjugal headquarters. As before, he mounted his old mare with a distinct air of cheerfulness.

'The dairy work will get along all right for a day or two, sir,' he said. 'Old Andy begins to be a fairish milker—he was dead slow at first—and Mr. Guy's a great help bailin' up. There's nothing brisks me up like a jaunt somewheres—I don't care where it is, if it was to the Cannibal Islands. God Almighty never intended me to stop long in one place, I expect.'

'A rolling stone gathers no moss, Dick,' said Wilfred. 'You'll never save up anything if you carry out those ideas always.'

'I don't want to save nothing, sir. I've no call to keep money in a box; I can find work pretty well wherever I go that will keep me and my old woman in full and plenty. I'm safe of my wages as long as I can work, and when I can't work no more I shall die—suddent like. I've always felt that.'

'But why don't you get a bit of land, Dick, and have a place of your own? You could easily save enough money to buy a farm.'

'Bless your heart, sir, I wouldn't live on a farm allers, day in, day out, if you'd give me one. I should get that sick of the place as I should come to hate the sight of it. But hadn't you better settle with yourself like, sir, what kind of stock you're agoin' to bid for when we get to Mick's? There'll be a lot of people there, and noise, and perhaps a little fighting if there's any grog goin', so it's best to be ready for action, as old Sir Hugh Gough used to tell us.'

'Mr. Churbett and Mr. Hamilton thought I should buy

all the mixed cattle, as many of them would be ready for the butcher before winter.'

'So they will, sir, or my name's not Richard Evans, twice corporal in the old 50th, and would have been sergeant, if I'd been cleverer at my book, and not quite so clever at the canteen. But that's neither here nor there. What I look at is, they're all dairy-bred cattle, and broke in close to your own run, which saves a power of trouble. If you can get a hundred or two of 'em for thirty shillings or two pound a head, they'll pay it all back by next season—easy and flippant.'

Finishing up with his favourite adjective, which he used when desirous of showing with what ridiculous ease any given result might be obtained, Mr. Richard Evans lighted his pipe with an air of assurance of success which commenced to infect his employer.

About mid-day they reached the abode of Michael Donnelly, Esq., as such designated by the local papers, who 'was about to submit to public competition his quiet and well-bred herd of dairy cattle, his choice stud, his equipages, farming implements, teams, carts, harness, etc., with other articles too numerous to mention.' Other articles there were none, except he had decided to sell the olive branches. Wilfred was shocked at the appearance of the homestead of this thriving farmer. The falling fences, the neglected orchard, the dilapidated hut, the curiously patched and mended stock-yard, partly brush, partly of logs, with here and there a gap, secured by a couple of rude tree-forks, with a clumsy sapling laid across—all these did not look like the surroundings of a man who could give his cheque for several thousand pounds. However, the personal appearance of Mick himself, an athletic, manly, full-bearded fellow, as also that of his family, was decidedly prepossessing. They were busily attending to the various classes of stock, with much difficulty kept apart for purposes of sale. Whatever else these Australian Celts lacked, they had been well nourished in youth and infancy. A finer sample of youthful humanity, physically considered, Wilfred had never seen. The lack of order everywhere visible had in no way reacted upon their faculties. All their lives they had known abundant nutriment, unrestricted range. Healthful exercise had been theirs,

congenial labour, and diet unstinted in the great essentials. Few other considerations had entered into the family councils.

And now they were about to migrate, like the world's elder children, to a land promising more room. Then, as now, a higher life was possible, where the sheep and the oxen, the camels and the asses, would enjoy a wider range. The sale over, they would once more resume that journey which, commencing soon after the marriage day of Michael Donnelly and Bridget Joyce, was not ended yet.

Wilfred Effingham was soon confirmed in his opinion that he had done well to attend. Many of the neighbouring settlers were there, as well as farmers and townspeople from Yass, brought together by the mysterious attraction of an auction sale. One of the townspeople, asking first if he was Mr. Effingham of Warbrok, put into his hand a note which ran as follows:—

'My dear Wilfred—I thought you were likely to be at Donnelly's sale, so I send you a line by a parishioner of mine. I have made inquiries about the stock, and consider that you could not do better than buy as many of the cattle as you have grass for. They are known to be quiet, having been used to dairy tending, and are certain to increase in value and number, as you have so much grass at Warbrok. Price about two pounds. A few horses would not be superfluous, and there are some good ones in Donnelly's lot, or they would hardly have stood his work. Mention my name to Mick, and say he is to let you down easy. I have had a touch of rheumatism lately—*et ego in Arcadia*—there's no escape from old age and its infirmities in any climate, however good, or I'd have looked you up before now. Tell your father I'm coming over soon. — Always yours sincerely, Harley Sternworth.'

The hour of sale having arrived, and indeed passed, the auctioneer, who had driven out from Yass for the purpose, commenced his task, which he did by climbing on to the 'cap' of the stock-yard and rapping violently with a hammer-handled hunting-crop. A broad-chested, stout-lunged, florid personage was Mr. Crackemup, and if selling by auction deserved to be ranked as one of the fine arts, he was no mean professor.

'Ladies and gentlemen!' he shouted 'I say ladies, for I notice quite a number of the fair sex have honoured me with their presence. Let me mention, in the first place, that the owner of this valuable stock we see before us has resolved to leave this part of the country. Yes, my friends, to leave Gumbaragongara for good and all! Why do I mention this fact—why do I dwell upon it? Because, ladies and gentlemen, it makes all the difference as to the *bona fide* nature of the sale which we are met together to-day to celebrate—that is—a—to carry out—according to these written conditions. My principal, Mr. Donnelly, with the shrewdness which has characterised him through life, seized upon this view of the case. "If I leave the country bodily," he said to me, "and sell the stock for what they'll fetch, no one can say that I went away and took the best with me." No, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Donnelly departs to-morrow for Monaro, taking only a dray and team, with a few riding-horses, so that all his well-bred, quiet, beautiful herd of dairy cattle, selected with great care from some of the best herds in the colony [here divers of the audience grinned irreverently], I shall have the honour of submitting to public competition this day.

'The first lot, ladies and gentlemen, is No. I. Generally so, isn't it? Ha! ha! One hundred and fifty-four cows and heifers, all broken to bail; most of them with calves at foot, or about to—to—become mothers.'

Mr. Crackemup was a man of delicate ideas, so he euphemised the maternal probabilities.

'Any one buying this choice lot, with butter at a shilling, and cheese not to be bought, buys a fortune. I will sell a "run out" of twenty head, with the option of taking the lot. "Fifteen shillings a head"—nonsense; one pound, twenty-two and six, twenty-five—thank you, miss; thirty shillings, thirty-five, thirty-seven and six—thank you, sir. One pound seventeen and sixpence, once; one pound seventeen and sixpence, twice; for the third and last time, one pound seventeen shillings and sixpence. Gone! What name shall I say, sir? "Howard Effingham, Warbrok Chase." Twenty head. Thank you, sir.'

At this critical moment the voice of Dick Evans was heard by Wilfred, in close proximity to his ear: 'Collar the

lot, sir; they're dirt cheap; soon be in full milk. Don't let 'em go.'

'I believe,' said Wilfred, raising his voice, 'that I have the option of taking the whole.'

'Quite correct, sir; but if I might advise——'

'I take the lot,' said Wilfred decisively.

And though there was a murmur from the crowd, and one stalwart dame said, 'That's not fair, thin; I med sure I'd get a pen of springers myself,' the auctioneer confirmed his right, and the dairy lot became his property.

It turned out, as is often the case, that the first offered stock were the most moderate in price. Many of the buyers had been holding back, thinking they would go in lots of twenty, and that better bargains might be obtained. When they found that the stranger had carried off all the best dairy cows, their disappointment was great.

'Serves you right, boys,' was heard in the big voice of the proprietor; 'if you had bid up like men, instead of keeping dark, you'd have choked the cove off taking the lot. Serves you all dashed well right.'

The remaining lots of cattle consisted of weaners, two and three-year-old steers and heifers. Of fat cattle the herd had been pretty well 'scraped,' as Donnelly called it, before the sale. For most of these the bidding was so brisk and spirited that Wilfred thought himself lucky in securing forty steers at twenty-five shillings, which completed his drove, and were placed in the yard with the cows.

Then came the horses; nearly a hundred all told—mares, colts, fillies, yearlings, with aged or other riding-horses. These last Donnelly excused himself for selling by the statement that if he took them to Monaro half of them would be lost trying to get back to where they had been bred, and that between stock-riders and cattle-stealers his chance of regaining them would be small.

'There they are,' he said; 'there's some as good blood among them as ever was inside a horse-skin. They're there to be sold.'

The spirit of speculation was now aroused in Wilfred, or he would not have bought, as he did, half-a-dozen of the best mares, picking them by make and shape, and a general look of breeding. They were middle-sized animals, more

like Arabs than the offspring of English thoroughbreds, but with a look of caste and quality, their legs and feet being faultless, their heads good, and shoulders fair. They fell to a bid of less than ten pounds each, and with foals at foot, Wilfred thought they could not be dear.

'Them's the old Gratis lot,' said Mr. Donnelly. 'I bought 'em from Mr. Busfield when they was fillies. You haven't made a bad pick for a new hand, sir. I wish you luck with 'em.'

'I hope so,' said Wilfred. 'If you breed horses at all, they may as well be good ones.' As he turned away he caught the query from a bystander—

'Why, you ain't going to sell old Barragon?'

'Yes, I am,' said Mick, who was evidently not a man of sentiment; 'all fences in the country wouldn't keep him away from these parts. He's in mostly runs near the lake, and eats more of that gentleman's grass than mine. He don't owe me nothin'.'

'You buy that horse, sir,' said Dick, who was acting the part of a moral Mephistopheles. 'He's as old as Mick, very near, and as great a dodger after cattle. But you can't throw him down, and the beast don't live that can get away from him on a camp.'

Wilfred turned and beheld a very old, grey horse cornered off, and standing with his ears laid back, listening apparently to Mr. Crackemup's commendations.

'Here you have, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Donnelly's favourite riding-horse Barragon, an animal, he informs me, that has done some of the most wonderful feats ever credited to a horse in any country—some exploits, indeed, which he scarcely likes to tell of. ['I'll be bound he don't,' drawled out a long, brown-faced bystander.] You have heard the reasons assigned for disposing of him here, rather than, as of course he would prefer to do, still keeping him attached to the fortunes of the family. His instinct is so strong, his intelligence so great, ladies and gentlemen, that he would unerringly find his way back from the farthest point of the Monaro district. What shall I say for him?'

'May as well have him, sir,' said his counsellor. 'He'll go cheap. He'll always stick to the lake; and if any one else gets him, they'll be wanting us to run him in, half the time.'

Wilfred looked at the horse. The type was one to which he had not been accustomed—neither a roadster, a hunter, a hackney, nor a harness horse — he was *sui generis*, the true Australian stock-horse, now rarely seen, and seldom up to the feats and performances of which grizzled veterans of the stock-whip love to tell.

No one with an eye for a horse could look at the war-worn screw without interest. A long, low horse, partaking more of the Arab type than the English, he possessed the shapes which make for endurance, and more than ordinary speed. The head was lean and well shaped, with a well-opened, still bright eye. The neck was arched, though not long; but the shoulder, to a lover of horses, was truly magnificent. Muscular, fairly high in the wither, and remarkably oblique, it permitted the freest action possible, while the rider who sat behind such a formation might enjoy a feeling of security far beyond the average. Battered and worn, no doubt, were the necessary supports, by cruelly protracted performances of headlong speed and wayfaring. Yet the flat cannon-bones, the iron hoofs, the tough tendons, had withstood the woeful hardships to which they had been subjected, with less damage than might have been expected. The knees slightly bent forward, the strained ligaments, showed partial unsoundness, yet was there no tangible 'break down.' What must such a horse have been in his colthood—in his prime?

A sudden feeling of pity arose in Wilfred's heart as he ran his eye critically over the scarred veteran. At a small price he would, no doubt, be a good investment, old as he was. He would be reasonably useful; and as a matter of charity one might do worse alms before Heaven than save one of the most gallant of God's creatures from closing his existence in toil and suffering. Mick's neighbours not being more sentimental than himself, Wilfred found himself the purchaser of the historical courser at a price considerably under five pounds.

'By George! I'm glad you've got him, mister,' said Mr. Donnelly, with vicarious generosity. 'I'm not rich enough to pension him, and the money he's fetched, put into a cow, will be something handsome in ten years. But he's a long ways from broke down yet; and you'll have your money's

worth out of him, with luck, before he kicks the bucket. You'd better ride him home, and I'll send my boy Jack with you as far as Benmohr. He'll lead Bob Jones's moke, that you rode here, and leave him in Argyll and Hamilton's paddock till he's sent for. You'd as well get off with your mob, if you want to get to Benmohr before dark.'

Wilfred recognised the soundness of this advice, and in a few minutes afterwards found himself upon Barragon. While Dick Evans promptly let out the cattle, Jack Donnelly, a brown-faced young centaur, riding a half-broken colt, and leading his late mount, commanded two eager cattle dogs to 'fetch 'em up.' The drove went off at a smart pace, and in five minutes they were out of sight of the yard, the farm, and the crowd, jogging freely along a well-marked track, which Dick stated to be the road to Benmohr.

This cheerful pace was, however, not kept up. The steers at the 'head' of the drove were inclined to go even too fast. It was necessary to restrain their ardour. The cows and calves became slow, obstinate, and disposed to spread, needing all the shouting of Dick and young Donnelly, as well as the personal violence of the latter's dogs, to keep them going. Wilfred rejoiced that he had obeyed the impulse to possess himself of old Barragon, when he found with what ease and comfort he was carried by the trained stock-horse in these embarrassing circumstances. Finally the weather changed, and it commenced to rain in the face of the cortège. Dick once or twice alluded to the uncertainty which would exist as to their getting all the cattle again if anything occurred to cause their loss this night. Lastly, just as matters began to look dark, Wilfred descried Benmohr.

The 'semi-detached' cottage which did duty as a spare bedroom had an earthen floor, and was not an ornate apartment; still, a blazing fire gave it an air of comfort after the chill evening air. Needful toilet requisites were provided, and the manifest cleanliness of the bed and belongings guaranteed a sound night's rest.

Upon entering the cottage, along a raised stone causeway, pointed out by Mr. Hamilton, Wilfred found his former acquaintance Mr. Argyll, and Mr. Churbett, with a neighbour, who was introduced as Mr. Forbes. The table

was already laid, and furnished with exceeding neatness for the evening meal. A glowing fire burned in the ample stone chimney, and as the three gentlemen rose to greet him, Wilfred thought he had never seen a more successful union of plainness of living, with the fullest measure of comfort.

'You have made the port just in time,' remarked Argyll; 'the rain is coming down heavily, and the night is as black as a wolf's throat. You seem to have bought largely at Donnelly's sale.'

'All the dairy cows and heifers, and a few steers for fattening,' answered Wilfred. 'I suppose we might have had some trouble in collecting them if they had got away from us to-night.'

'So much that you might have never seen half of them again,' said Mr. Churbett promptly. 'You would have been hunting for them for weeks, and picked them up "in twos and threes and mobs of one," as I did my Tumut store cattle, that broke away the first night I got them home.'

Wilfred felt in a condition to do ample justice to the roast chicken and home-cured ham, and even essayed a shaving of the goodly round of beef, which graced one end of the table. After concluding with coffee, glorified with delicious cream, Wilfred, as they formed a circle round the fire, came to the conclusion, either that it was the best dinner he had eaten in the whole course of his life, or else that he had never been quite so hungry before.

In despite of Mrs. Teviot's admonitions, none of the party sought their couches much before midnight. There was a rubber of whist—perhaps two. There was much general conversation afterwards, including literary discussion. One of the features of the apartment was a well-filled bookcase. Finally, when Mr. Hamilton escorted Wilfred to his chamber, he said, 'You needn't bother about getting up early to-morrow. Trust old Dick to have the cattle away at sunrise; he and the boy can drive them easily now, till you overtake them. We breakfast about nine o'clock, and Fred Churbett will keep you company in lying up.'

The night was murky and drizzling; the morning would probably resemble it. Wilfred was tired. He knew that Dick would be up and away with the dawn. He himself wished to consult his new friends about points of practice

germane to his present position. On the whole he thought he could safely take Mr. Hamilton's advice.

His slumbers that night, in bed-linen fragrant as Ailie Dinmont's, were deep and dreamless. Surely it could not have been morning, it was so dark, and still raining, when he heard knocking at a window, and a voice thrice repeat the words, 'Maister Hamilton, are ye awauk?' but the words melted away—a luxurious drowsiness overpowered his senses. The rain's measured fall and tinkling plash changed into the mill-wheel dash of his childhood's wonder in Surrey. When he awoke, the sky was dark, but there was the indefinable sensation that it was not very early. So he dressed, and beholding a large old pair of 'clodhoppers' standing temptingly near, he bestowed himself in them and cautiously made towards the milking-yard. He looked across to the enclosure where his cattle had been during the previous night. It was a smooth and apparently deep sea of liquid mud, so sincerely churned had it been during the wet night. He felt grieved for the discomfort of the poor cattle, but relieved to know that they had been hours before on the grass, and were well on their way to Warbrok Chase.

At the milking-yard he saw a sight which had never before met his eyes. The morning's work had apparently been just completed. Argyll was walking towards the dairy, a pisé building with thick, earthen walls. He carried two immense cans full to the brim with milk. Hamilton was wading through the yard behind about sixty cows and calves, which were stolidly ploughing through a lake of liquid mud. As they quitted the rough stone causeway, they appeared to drop with reluctance into a species of slough. An elderly Scot, approaching the type of Andrew Cargill, was labouring, nearly knee-deep, solemnly after. He and Mr. Hamilton were splashed from head to foot; it would have been a delicate task to recognise either. The latter, coming to a pool of water, deliberately walked in, thus purifying both boot and lower leg.

'Muddy work, this milking in wet weather,' said he calmly, scraping a piece of caked mud about the size of a cheese-plate from the breast of his serge shirt. 'It would need to pay well, for it *is* exceedingly disagreeable.'

'Very much so, indeed, I should think,' assented Wilfred,

rather shocked. 'I had no idea that dairy work on a large scale could be so unpleasant.'

'Ours is perhaps more mud-larking than most people's,' said Mr. Hamilton reflectively, 'chiefly from the richness of the soil, so we endure it. But you must look into the cheese-room—the bright side of the affair financially.'

Wilfred was much impressed with the dairy, a substantial, thatched edifice, having a verandah on four sides. The pisé walls—nearly two feet thick—were of earth, rammed in a wooden frame after a certain formula.

'Here is the best building on the station,' said his guide. 'We reared this noble pile ourselves, in the days of our colonial inexperience, entirely by the directions contained in a book, with the aid of old Wullie and our emigrant labourers. After we became more "Australian" and "less nice" we took to slabs. It was quicker work, but our architecture suffered.'

In one portion of this building were rows of milk-vessels, while ranged on shelves one above another, and occupying three sides of the building, were hundreds of fair, round, orthodox-looking cheeses, varying in colour from pale yellow to orange. They presented an appearance more akin to a midland county farm than an Australian cattle-station.

'There, you see the compensation for early rising, wet feet, and mud-plastering. We have a ready sale for twice as many cheeses as Mrs. Teviot can turn out, at a very paying price. Her double Stiltons are famed for their richness and maturity. We pay a large part of the station expenses in this way; besides, what is of more importance, improving the cattle, by keeping the herd quiet and promoting their aptitude to fatten.'

'You have no sheep, I think?' inquired Wilfred.

'No; but we breed horses on rather a large scale. I must show you my pet, Camerton, by and by. Now I must dress for breakfast, for which I daresay you are quite ready.'

After a reasonable interval the partners appeared neatly attired, though still in garments adapted for station work. It was an exceedingly cheerful meal, the proverbial Scottish breakfast, admitted to be unsurpassable—devilled chicken and grilled bones, alternated with the incomparable round of beef, which had excited Wilfred's admiration on the preceding

day. Piles of boiled eggs, and *such* a jug of cream! fresh butter, short-cake, and the unfailing oatmeal porridge completed the fare, to which Wilfred, after his observations and inquiries, felt himself fully qualified to do justice.

'Well, Charles,' said Mr. Churbett, desisting from a sustained attack upon the toast and eggs, 'how do you feel after your day's work? What an awful number of hours you have been up and doing! That's what makes you so frightfully arrogant. It's the comparison of yourself with ordinary mortals like me, for instance, who lie in bed.'

'You certainly do take it easy, Master Fred,' returned Hamilton, 'to an extent I cannot hope to imitate. Every man to his taste, you know. You have a well-grassed, well-watered, open country at The She-oaks; once get your cattle there and they are no trouble to look after. Nature has done so much that I am afraid—as in South America—man does very little.'

'Shows his sense,' asserted Mr. Churbett calmly. 'Don't you be imposed upon, Effingham, by these people here; they have a mania for bodily labour, and all sorts of unsuitable employment. I didn't come out to Australia to be a navvy or a ploughman; I could have found similar situations at home. I go in for the true pastoral life—an Arab steed, a tent, cool claret, and a calm supervision of other men's labours.'

'Did the Sheik Ibrahim drink claret, or go to the theatre, leaving his flocks and herds to the Bedaween?' said Mr. Forbes. 'Some people appear to be able to combine the pleasures of all religions with the duties of none.'

'Smart antithesis, James,' said Churbett approvingly. 'I'll take another cup of tea, please, to keep. I'm going to read Sydney Smith in the verandah after breakfast. Yes, I *am* proud of that theatre exploit. Few people would have nerve for it.'

'You would have needed all your nerve if you had found a hundred and fifty fat cattle scattered and gone next morning,' said Mr. Forbes, a quietly sarcastic personage.

'But they were *not* gone, my dear fellow; what's the use of absurd suppositions? We got back before daylight. Not a beast had left the camp. Now there are a great many people who would never have thought of doing that.'

'I should say not,' said Hamilton. 'Fred, your natural advantages will be the death of you yet. Come with me, Effingham, if you want to see the dam and the old horse. They are our show exhibits, and we are rather proud of them.'

Walking through the garden to the lower end of the slope upon which the homestead of Benmohr was built, Wilfred saw that the course of the creek, dignified with the name of a river, had been arrested by a wide and solid embankment, half-way up the broad breast of which a sheet of deep, clear water came, while for a greater distance than the eye could reach along its winding course was a far-stretching reservoir, lake-like, reed-bordered, and half-covered with wild-fowl.

'Here you see our greatest difficulty, Effingham, and our greatest triumph. When we took up this run a shallow stream ran in winter and spring, but in summer it was invariably dry. This exposed us to expense, even loss. So we resolved to construct a dam. We did so, at some cost in hired labour; a spring flood washed it away. Next year we tried again, and the same result followed. Then the neighbours pitied and "I told you so'd" us to such an extent that we felt that dam *must* be made and rendered permanent. We had six months' work at it last summer; during most of the time I did navvy work, wheeling my barrow up and down a plank like the others. It was a stiff job. I invented additions, and faced it with stone. That fine sheet of water is the result of it; I believe it will stand now till the millennium, or the alteration of the land laws.'

'I quite envy you,' said Wilfred. 'A conflict with natural forces is always exciting. I am quite of your opinion; the great advantage of this Australian life is that a man enjoys the permission of society to work with his hands as well as his head.'

Leaving the water for an isolated wooden building in the neighbourhood of the offices, Mr. Hamilton opened the upper half of a stable-door and discovered to view a noble, dark chestnut thoroughbred in magnificent condition.

'Here is one of my daily tasks,' said he, removing the gallant animal's sheet and patting his neck. 'In this case it is a labour of love, as I am passionately fond of horses, and have a theory of my own about breeding which I am trying to carry out. Isn't he a beauty?'

Wilfred, looking at the satin skin of the grand animal before him, thought he had rarely seen his equal.

'You observe,' said Hamilton, 'in this sire, if I mistake not, characteristics not often seen in English studs. Camerton combines the perfect symmetry, the beauty and matchless constitution of the desert Arab with the size and bone of the English thoroughbred.

'He does give me that idea, precisely,' said Wilfred. 'Wonderful make and shape. His back rib has the cask-like roundness of the true Arab; and what legs and feet! Looking at him you see an enlarged Arab.'

'His grand-dam was a daughter of The Sheik, an Arab of the purest Seglawee strain of the Nejed, imported from India many years ago by a cavalry officer, whose charger he was. He has besides the Whisker, Gratis, and Emigrant blood. In him we have at once the horse of the new and of the old world—the size and strength of the Camerton type, the symmetry of the Arab, and such legs and feet as might have served Abdjar, the steed of Antar.'

When they re-entered the cottage they saw Mr. Churbett, who had intended to go home that morning, but finding the witty Canon such pleasant reading, thought he would start in the afternoon, finally making up his mind to stay another day and leave punctually after breakfast. There was nothing to do—he observed—and no one to talk to, when he did get home, so there was the less reason for haste.

'You had better stay, Fred, and go with me to Yass,' suggested Argyll. 'I am going there next week, and I dare-say you have some business there.'

'I believe I have; indeed, I know that I have been putting off something old Billy Rockley blew me up about last month, and I'll go in with you and get it over. But I won't stay now. I'll go to-morrow, or my stock-rider will think I'm lost and take to embezzling my bullocks, instead of stealing my neighbour's calves, which is his duty to do. One must keep up discipline.'

After lunch Wilfred mounted his ancient charger and departed along the track to Warbrok, Mr. Churbett volunteering to show him the way past divers snares for the unwary, yclept 'turn-off' roads.

'These two fellows,' said he, 'have no end of what they

call duties to perform before nightfall, and can't be spared of course; but I can spare myself easily, and give Duellist exercise besides.'

Presently Mr. Churbett, who was a very neat figure, having assumed breeches and boots, appeared mounted upon a magnificent bay horse, the finest hackney, in appearance, which Wilfred had yet seen. A bright bay with black points, showing no white but a star in the centre of his broad forehead; he stood at least fifteen hands three inches in height, with all the appearance of high caste and courage. As they started he showed signs of impatience, and then, arching his neck, set off at a remarkably fast walk, which caused Barragon's stock-horse jog to appear slow and ungraceful.

'What a glorious hackney!' said Wilfred, half enviously. 'Did you breed him?'

'No, don't breed horses; too much expense and bother. Fools breed—that is, enthusiasts—and wise men buy. He's a Wanderer, bred by Rowan of Pechelbah. Got him rather cheap about six months ago; gave five-and-twenty pounds for him. The man that *did* breed him, of course, couldn't afford to ride him; thought he had others as good at home, which I take leave to doubt.'

'I should think so! What a price for a horse of his figure—five years old, you say, and clean thoroughbred. A gift! Is he fast?'

'Pretty well. I shall run him for the Maiden Plate at Yass Races. And now, do you see that turn-off road? Well, don't turn off; by and by you will come to another; follow it, and you will have no further chance of losing your way. I'll say good-afternoon.'

His amusing friend turned, and as Duellist's hoofs died away in the distance, Wilfred took the old horse by the head and sent him along at a hand-gallop, only halting occasionally until, just as the dusk was impending, the far-gleaming waters of the lake came into view. Dick had arrived hours before, and had all his charge secured in the now creditable stock-yard. The absentee was welcomed with enthusiasm by the whole family, who appeared to think he had been away for months, to judge by the warmth of their greetings.

CHAPTER VII

TOM GLENDINNING, STOCK-RIDER

'COME in at once, this moment, and tell us all about everybody,' said Annabel; 'tea is nearly ready, and we are hungry for news, and even just a little gossip. Have you enjoyed yourself and seen many new people? What a fine thing it is to be a man!'

'I have seen all the world, like the little bird that flew over the garden wall. I have enjoyed myself very much, have bought a few horses and many cattle, also spent a very pleasant evening at Benmohr. Where shall I begin?'

'Oh, about the people of course; you can come to the other things later on. People are the only topics of interest to us. And oh, what do you think? We have seen strangers too. More wonderful still, a lady. What will you give me if I describe her to you?'

'Don't feel interested in a sketch of a lady visitor,' said Wilfred. 'A description of a good cheese-press, if you could find one, would be nearer the mark.'

'You would not speak in that way if you had seen Mrs. Snowden,' said Rosamond, 'unless you are very much changed.'

'She is a wonder, and a paragon, of course; did she grow indigenously?'

'She's so sweet-looking,' said Annabel impetuously; 'she rode such a nice horse too, very well turned out, as you would say. She talks French and German; she has travelled, and been everywhere. And yet they have only a small station, and she sometimes has to do housework—there now!'

'What a wonderful personage! And monsieur—is he worthy of so much perfection?'

'He's a gentlemanlike man, rather good-looking, who made himself agreeable. Rosamond has been asked to go and stay with them. Really, the place seems *full* of nice people. Did you see or hear of any more?'

'Yes; now I come to think of it, I heard of two more, great friends of Argyll and Hamilton and of Mr. Churbett, whom I saw there. Their names are D'Oyley; Bryson, the younger brother, is a poet; at any rate these are some of his verses which Mr. Churbett handed to me *apropos* of our lives here, shutting out all thoughts but the austerely practical. Yes; I haven't lost them.'

'So you talk of cheese-presses and bring home poetry! Is that your idea of the practical? I vote that Rosamond reads them out while we are having tea. Gracious! Ever so many verses.'

'They seem original; and not so many of one's neighbours could write them in any part of the world,' said Rosamond. 'I will read them out, if Annabel will promise not to interrupt in the midst of the most pathetic part.'

'I am all attention,' said Annabel, throwing herself into an easy-chair. 'I wonder what sort of a man Mr. D'Oyley is, and what coloured eyes he has. I like to know all about authors.'

'Never saw him; go on, Rosamond,' said Wilfred, and the elder sister, thus adjured, commenced—

A FRAGMENT

Deem we our waking dreams
  But shadows from the deep;
And do the offspring of the mind
  In barrenness descend
  To an eternal sleep?

Each print of Beauty's feet
  Leads upward to her throne;
For every thought by conscience bless'd,
  Benignant virtue yields
  A jewel from her zone.

. . . . .

The rainbow hath its cloud,
The seasons gird the sphere,
We know their time and place, but thou,
Whence art thou, Child of Light,
And what thy mission here?

Like meteor stars that stream
Adown the dark obscure,
Didst thou descend from angel homes,
To bless with angel joys
Abodes less bright and pure?

Thy beauty and thy love
May mortal transports share,
Aspire with quivering wings to reach
The spirits of thy thought
That breathe celestial air.

Thou art no child of Earth.
Earth's fairest children weep
That o'er affection's sweetest lyre,
By phantom minstrels stirred,
Unhallowed strains will sweep.

While zephyr-wings may guard,
The rose its bloom retains;
The autumn blast o'er sere leaves wails;
Upon the naked stem
The thorn alone remains.

. . .

The sun-rays scattered far
Seek now the parent breast,
In gentler glory gathering o'er
The floating isles that speck
The landscape of the West.

Mute visitants! their smiles
A fleeting welcome bear,
Light on thy form the glad beams play,
And mingling with its folds
Curl down thy golden hair.

Methinks, as standing thus
Against the glowing sky,
That shadowy form, faint-tinged with gold,
And raptured face, recall
A dream of days gone by.

Glimpses of shadows past,
That boyhood's mind pursued,
In curious wonder shaping forth
Its visions of the pure,
The beautiful, the good.

Till, like the moon's full orb
Above the silent sea,
One Form expanding bright arose,
And fancy's mirror showed
An image like to thee.

Of headlong hopes that spurned
The curb of destiny,
When my soul asked what most it craved,
Still, still, the mirror showed
An image like to thee.

'I think they are beautiful and uncommon,' said Annabel decidedly; 'only I don't understand what he means.'

'Obscurity is a quality he has in common with distinguished latter-day poets,' said Wilfred. 'Commencing with the ideal, he has finished with the real and personal, as happens much in life. I think "A Fragment" is refined, thoughtful, and truly poetic in feeling.'

'So do I,' agreed Rosamond. 'Mr. Bryson D'Oyley is no every-day squatter, I was going to say, but as all our neighbours seem to be distinguished people, we must agree that he is fully up to the average of cattlemen, as they call themselves.'

'I *must* tell Mrs. Snowden about the cheese-press simile. You will be ready to commit suicide after you have seen her.'

'Then I must keep out of her way. Rosamond, suppose you sing something. I have not heard a piano since I left.'

'Mrs. Snowden tried it, and sang "Je n'aimerai, jamais." Her voice was not wonderful, but it is easy to see what thorough training she has had.'

'There is a forfeit for any one who mentions Mrs. Snowden again this evening,' said Mrs. Effingham. 'We must not have her spread out over our daily life, fascinating as I grant her to be. Beatrice and Annabel have been learning a new duet, which they will sing after Rosamond. I think you will like it, and this is such a charming room to sing in.'

'That's one advantage belonging to this old house,' said Rosamond, 'our music-room is perfect. It is quite a pleasure

to hear one's voice in it; and when we *do* furnish the dining-room, if we are ever inclined to give a party—a most unlikely thing at present—it is large enough to hold all the people in the district.'

. . . . . .

During the following week the men of the family occupied themselves in branding and regulating the new cattle. A portion of these, having young calves at foot, were at once amalgamated with the dairy herd. This being accomplished, it was apparent that some division must be made between the old and the new cattle. There were too many of them to be mixed up in one herd, and the steers, in close quarters, were not good for the health of the cows and smaller cattle. From all this it resulted that the oracle (otherwise Dick), being consulted, made response that a stock-rider must be procured who would look after all the cattle, other than the milch kine, and 'break them into the Run.'

Wilfred was inclined to be opposed to this project, but reflected that if any were lost, it would soon amount to more than a man's wages; also, that the labour of the dairy, with the rapid increase of the O'Desmond cattle, was becoming heavier, and required all Guy's and Andrew's attention to keep it in order.

'For what time would a stock-rider be required?' he asked.

'Why, you see, sir,' said Dick, 'these here cattle, if they're not watched for the next three months, may give us the slip, and be back among the ranges, at Mick's place, where they was bred, afore you could say Jack Robinson. You and I couldn't leave the dairy, and the calves coming so fast, if we was never to see 'em again.'

'I understand,' said Wilfred; 'but how are we to pick up a stock-rider such as you describe? I suppose we shall have to pay him forty or fifty pounds a year.'

'I don't know as we should, sir. There's a man, if we could get hold on him, as would jest do for the work and the place. I heard of him being in Yass last week, finishing his cheque, and if you'll let me away to-morrow, I'll fetch him back with me next day, most likely. He'll come reasonable for wages; he used to live here, in the old Colonel's time, and knows every inch of the country.'

'Very well, Dick, you can go. I daresay we can manage the dairy for a day.'

On the next morning, after milking-time, Mr. Richard Evans presented himself in review order, when, holding his mare by the bridle, he asked for the advance of two pounds sterling, for expenses, and so on.

'You see, I want a pair of boots, Mr. Wilfred, and I may as well get 'em in Yass while I'm about it.'

'Oh, certainly,' assented Wilfred, thinking that he never saw the veteran look more respectable. 'The air of Warbrok agrees with you, Dick; I never saw you look better.'

'Work allers did agree with me, sir,' he answered modestly, unhitching his bridle with a slight appearance of haste, as Mrs. Evans came labouring up and and glanced suspiciously at the notes which he placed in his pocket.

'I hope he'll look as well when he comes back,' said she, with a meaning glance; 'but if he and that old rascal Tom gets together, they'll——'

'Never you mind, old woman,' interrupted Dick, riding off, 'you look after them young pigs and give 'em the skim milk reg'lar. Tom Glendinning and I'll be here to-morrow night, if I can find him.'

Mrs. Evans raised her hand in what might be accepted as a warning or a threatening gesture, and Wilfred, wondering at the old woman's manner, betook himself to his daily duties.

'A grumbling old creature,' he soliloquised. 'I don't wonder that Dick is glad to get away from her tongue. She ought to be pleased that he should have a holiday occasionally.'

On the morning following Richard Evans's departure, extra exertion was entailed upon Wilfred and Guy, as also upon Andrew Cargill, by reason of their having to divide the milking of his proportion of the cows among them. As Dick was a rapid and exhaustive operator, his absence was felt, if not regretted. As they returned from the troublesome task, a full hour later than usual, Wilfred consoled himself by the thought that the next day would find this indispensable personage at his post.

'I wadna hae thocht,' confessed Andrew, 'that the auld,

rough-tongued carle's absence could hae made siccan a camstairy. But he's awfu' skeely wi' thae wild mountain queys, and kens brawly hoo tae daiker them. It's no said for naught that the children o' the warld are wiser in their generation than the children o' licht. He'll be surely back the morn's morn.'

Explaining Dick's eminence in the milking-yard by this classification, and undoubtedly including himself in the latter category, Andrew betook himself to an outer apartment, where the scrupulous Jeanie had provided full means of ablution.

The next day passed without the appearance of the confidential retainer. Another, and yet another. In default of his aid, Wilfred exerted himself to the utmost and succeeded in getting through the ordinary work; yet a sense of incompleteness pervaded the establishment. Ready-witted, tireless, and perfect in all the minor attainments of Australian country life, Dick was a man to be missed in a hundred ways in an establishment like Warbrok Chase.

New cows had calved and required milking for the first time. One of them had shown unexpected ferocity; indeed, knocking over Andrew, and disabling his right arm.

'The old fellow may have had an accident,' suggested Mr. Effingham; 'I suppose such things occur on these wild roads; or he *may* have indulged in an extra glass or two.'

'I said as much to that old wife of his,' said Wilfred, 'but she grumbled something about the devil taking care of his own; he would be back when he had had his "burst" —whatever that means—and that he and that old villain Tom Glendinning would turn up at the end of this week or next, whenever their money was done.'

'Why, if there isn't old Dick coming along the road now,' said Guy; 'that's his mare, anyhow, I know the switch of her tail. There's a man on a grey horse with him.'

In truth, as the two horsemen came nearer along the undulating forest road, it became apparent that their regretted Richard, and no other, was returning to his family and friends. His upright seat in the saddle could be plainly distinguished as he approached on the old bay mare. The London dealer's phrase of a 'good ride and drive

horse' held good in her case, as she came along at her usual pace of a quick-stepping walk, with her head down and her hind legs brought well under her at every stride. The other horseman rode behind, not caring apparently to quicken the unmistakable 'stockman's jog' of his wiry, high-boned grey horse. His lounging seat was in strong contrast to his companion's erect bearing, but it told of the stock-rider's long days and nights passed in the saddle. Not unlike the courser of Mazeppa was his hardy steed in more than one respect.

> Shaggy and swift and strong of limb,
> All Tartar-like he carried him.

The Arab blood, which old Tom's charger displayed, prevented any particular shagginess; but in the bright eye, the lean head, the sure unfaltering step, as well as in the power of withstanding every kind of climate, upon occasion, upon severely restricted sustenance, 'Boney' might have vied with the Hetman's, or any other courser that

> . . . . grazed at ease
> Beside the swift Borysthenes.

Such in appearance, and so mounted, were the horsemen who now approached. Their mode of accost was characteristic. Dick road up straight till within a few paces of his employer, when he briskly dismounted, and stood erect, making the ordinary salute.

The effects of the week's dissipation were plainly visible in the veteran's countenance, gallant as were his efforts to combine intrepidity with the respectful demeanour of discipline. A bruise under one eye, with other discolorations, somewhat marred the effect of his steady gaze, while a tremulous muscular motion could not be concealed.

'How is this, Evans?' said his commander; 'you have broken your leave, and put us to much inconvenience; what have you been doing with yourself all this time?'

'Got drunk, Captain!' replied the veteran, with military brevity, and another salute of regulation correctness.

'I am sorry to hear it, Richard,' said Mr. Effingham. 'You appear to have had a skirmish also, and to have

suffered in engagement. I daresay it will act as a caution to you for the future.'

'Did me a deal of good—begging your honour's pardon—though I didn't ought to have promised to come back next day. I was that narvous at breakfast afore I went that I couldn't scarce abear to hear the old woman's voice. I'll be as right as a Cheshire recruit till Christmas now. But I've done the outpost duty I was told off for, and brought Tom Glendinning. He's willin' to engage for ten shillin' a week and his keep, and his milkin's worth that any day.'

The individual addressed moved up his elderly steed, and touching his hat with a faint flavour of the gentleman's servant habitude long past, fixed upon the group the gleaming eyes which surmounted his hollow cheek. The face itself was bronzed, well-nigh blackened out of all resemblance to that of a white man. Trousers of a kind of fustian, buttressed with leather under the knees and other places (apparently for resisting the friction involved by a life in the saddle), protected his attenuated limbs. The frame of the man was lean and shrunken. He had a worn and haggard look, as if labour, privation, and the indulgence of evil passions had wrecked the frail tenement of a soul. Yet was there a wiry look about the figure—a dauntless glitter in the keen eyes which told that their possessor could yet play a man's part on earth before he went to his allotted place. A footsore dog with a rough coat and no particular tail had by this time limped up to the party and lay down under the horses' feet.

'Are you willing to engage with me on the terms mentioned by Richard Evans?' asked Mr. Effingham. 'You are acquainted with this place, I believe?'

'I was here,' answered the ancient stock-rider, 'when the Colonel first got a grant of Warbrok from the Crown. A lot of us Government men was sent up with the overseer, Ben Grindham, to clear a paddock for corn, where all that horehound grows now. We had a row over the rations—he drove us like niggers, and starved us to boot (more by token, it's little we had to ate)—and big Jim Baker knocked his head in with an axe, blast him! He was always a fool. I seen him carried to the old hut where you see them big stones—part of the chimney, they wor.'

'Good heavens!' said Wilfred. 'And what was done?'

'Jim was hanged, all reg'lar, as soon as they could get him back to Sydney. We was all "turned in to Government,"' said the chronicler. 'After a bit, the Colonel got me back for groom, so I stayed here till my time was out. I know the old place (I had ought to), every rod of it, back to the big Bindarra.'

'You can milk well, I believe?'

'He can do most things, sir,' said Dick, comprehensively guaranteeing his friend, and mounting his mare, he motioned to the old fellow, who had just commenced to emit a derisive chuckle from his toothless gums, to follow him. 'If you'll s'cuse us now, sir, we'll go home and get freshened up a bit. Tom won't be right till he's had a sleep. He's hardly had his boots off for a week. You'll see us at the yard in the morning all right, sir, never fear.'

'Well, I'm glad you've come back, Dick,' said Guy; 'we've missed you awfully. The heifers are too much for Andrew. However, it's all right now, so the sooner you get home and make yourself comfortable the better.'

This suggestion, as the ancient prodigals ambled away together, caused old Dick to grin doubtfully. 'I've got to have it out with my old woman yet, sir.'

Whatever might have occurred in the progress of a difficult explanation with Mrs. Evans, the result was so far satisfactory that on the following morning, when Wilfred went down to the milking-yard, he found the pair in full possession of the situation, while the number of calves in companionship with their mothers, as well as the state of the brimming milk-cans, testified to the early hour at which work had commenced.

Dick had regained his easy supremacy, as with a mixture of fearlessness and diplomacy he exercised a Rarey-like influence over the wilder cows, lately introduced to the milking-yard.

His companion, evidently free of the guild, was causing the milk to come streaming out of the udder of a newly calved heifer, as if by the mere touch of his fingers, the bottom of his bucket rattling the while like a small-sized hailstorm.

Greeting the old man cheerfully, and making him a com-

pliment on his milking, Wilfred was surprised at the alteration in his appearance and manner.

The half-reckless, defiant tone was replaced by a quiet bearing and respectful manner. The expression of the face was changed. The eyes, keen and restless, had lost their savage gleam. An alert step, a ready discharge of every duty, with the smallest details of which he seemed instinctively acquainted, had succeeded the lounging bearing of the preceding day. Wilfred thought he had never seen a man so markedly changed in so short a time.

'You both seem improved, Dick. I suppose the morning air has had something to do with it.'

'Yes, sir—thank God,' said he, 'I'm always that fresh after a good night's sleep, when I've had a bit of a spree, that I could begin again quite flippant. Old Tom had a goodish cheque this time, and was at it a week afore I came in. *He looked* rather shickerry. But he's as right as a toucher now, and you won't lose no calves while *he's* here, I'll go bail. He can stay in my hut. My old woman and he knowed one another years back, and she'll cook and wash for him, though they do growl a bit at times.'

It soon became apparent, making due deductions for periodical aberrations, that Mr. Effingham possessed in Dick Evans and Tom Glendinning two rarely efficient servitors. They knew everything, they did everything; they never required to be reminded of any duty whatsoever, being apparently eager to discover matters for the advantage of the establishment, in which they appeared to take an interest not inferior to that of the proprietor. Indeed, they not infrequently volunteered additional services for their employer's benefit.

The season had now advanced, until the fervid height of midsummer was near, and still no hint of aught but continuous prosperity was given to the emigrant family.

Though the sun flamed high in the unspecked firmament, yet from time to time showers of tropical suddenness kept the earth cool and moist, refreshing the herbage, and causing the late-growing maize to flourish greenly, in the dark unexhausted soil. Their wheat crop had been reaped with but little assistance from any but the members and retainers of the family. And now a respectable stack occupied

jointly, with one of oaten hay, the modest stack-yard, or haggard, as old Tom called it.

The cheese operations developed, until row upon row of rich orange-coloured cheeses filled the shelves of the dairy.

The garden bore token of Andrew's industry in the pruned and renovated fruit trees, which threw out fresh leaves and branches; while the moist open season had been favourable to the 'setting' of a much more than ordinary yield of fruit. The crops of vegetables, of potatoes, of other more southern esculents looked, to use Andrew's phrase, 'just unco-omon.' Such vegetables, Dick confessed, had not been seen in it since the days of the Colonel, who kept two gardeners and a spare boy or two constantly at work. Gooseberries, currants, and the English fruits generally, were coming on, leading to the belief that an extensive jam manufacture would once more employ Jeanie and the well-remembered copper stew-pan—brought all the way from Surrey.

The verandah was once more a 'thing of beauty' in its shade of 'green gloom.' The now protected climbers had glorified the wreathed pillars; again gay with the purple racemes of the Wistaria and the deep orange flowers of the *Bignonia venusta*. The lawn was thickly carpeted with grass; the gravelled paths were raked and levelled by Andrew, whenever he could gain an hour's respite from dairy and cheese-room.

The increase of the cattle had been of itself considerable, while the steers of the Donnelly contingents fattened on the newly matured grasses, which now commenced to send forth that sweetest of all summer perfumes, the odour of the new-mown meadows.

The small but gay parterres, which the girls and Mrs. Effingham kept, with some difficulty, free from weeds, were lovely to the eye as contrasted with the bright green sward of the lawn.

The wildfowl dived and flew upon the lake, furnishing forth for a while—as in obedience to Mr. Effingham's wishes a close season was kept—unwonted supplies to the larder.

All the minor living possessions of the family appeared to bask and revel in the sunshine of the general prosperity. The greyhounds, comfortably housed and well fed, had

reared a family, and were commencing to master the science of killing kangaroos without exposing themselves to danger.

The Jersey cow, Daisy, had produced a miniature copy of herself, in a fawn-coloured heifer calf, while her son, 'The Yerl of Jersey,' as Andrew had christened him, had become a thick-set, pugnacious, important personage, pawing the earth, and bellowing unnecessarily, as if sensible of the exalted position he was destined to take, as a pure bred Jersey bull, under two years of age, at the forthcoming Yass Agricultural Show.

As the days grew longer, and the daily tasks of labour became less exciting in the neighbourhood, as well as at Warbrok Chase, much occasional visiting sprang up. The stable was once more capable of modest entertainment, though far from emulating the hospitalities of the past, when, in the four-in-hand drag of the reigning regiment, the fashionables of the day thought worth while to rattle over the unmade roads for the pleasure of a week's shooting on the lake by day, with the alternative of the Colonel's peerless claret by night. Andrew's boy, Duncan, a solemn lad of fourteen, whom his occasionally impatient sire used to scold roundly, was encouraged to be in attendance to receive the stranger cavalry.

For one afternoon, Fred Churbett's Grey Surrey, illustrious as having won the Ladies' Bag two years running at the Yass Races, and, as such, equal in provincial turf society to a Leger winner, would canter daintily up to the garden gate, followed perhaps at no great interval by Charlie Hamilton's chestnut, Red Deer, in training for the Yass Maiden Plate, and O'Desmond's Wellesley, to ensure whose absolute safety he brought his groom. On the top of all this Captain and Mrs. Snowden would arrive, until the dining-room, half filled with the fashion of the district, did not look too large after all.

By degrees, rising to the exigencies of his position, Wilfred managed to get hold of a couple of ladies' horses, by which sensible arrangement at least three of the family were able to enjoy a ride together, also to return Mrs. Snowden's call, and edify themselves with the conversation of that amusing woman of the world.

And the more Mr. Effingham and his sons saw of the

men composing the little society which shared with them the very considerable district in which they resided, the more they had reason to like and respect them.

. . . . . .

The blessed Christmastide was approaching. How different was it in appearance from the well-remembered season in their own beloved home! A thousand reminiscences came rushing across the fields of memory, as the Effinghams thought of the snow-clad hedges, the loaded roofs, the magical stillness of the frost-arrested air. Nor were all the features of the season attractive. Heavy wraps, closed doors, through which, in spite of heaped-up fires, keen draught and invisible chills would intrude; the long evenings, the dark afternoons, the protracted nights, which needed all the frolic spirits of youth, the affection of home life, and the traditional revelry of the season to render endurable.

How different were all things in this strange, far land!

Such soft airs, such fresh, unclouded morns, such far-reaching views across the purple mountains, such breeze-tossed masses of forest greenery, such long, unclouded days were theirs, in this the first midsummer of what Annabel chose to call 'Australia Felix.'

'I should have just the same feeling,' she said, 'if I lived in the desert under favourable circumstances. Not the horrid sandy, simoomy part of it, of course. But some of those lovely green spots, where there is a grey walled-in town, an old, old well, thousands of years old, and such lovely horses standing at the doors of the tents. Why can't we have our horses broken in to stand like that, instead of having to send Duncan for them, who takes hours? And then we could ride out by moonlight and *feel* the grand silence of the desert; and at sunset the grey old chiefs and the maidens and the camels and the dear little children would come to the village well, like Rebekah or Rachel—which was it? I shall go to Palestine some day, and be a Princess, like Lady Hester Stanhope. This is only the first stage.'

CHAPTER VIII

MR. WILLIAM ROCKLEY OF YASS

Upon his next visit to The Chase, which took place shortly after this conversation, the Reverend Harley Sternworth was accompanied by a pleasant-looking, alert, middle-aged personage, who, descending from the dog-cart with alacrity, was introduced as Mr. William Rockley of Yass.

'Bless my soul!' said this gentleman, looking eagerly around, 'what a fine property! Never saw it look so well before. I'm delighted to find it has got into such good hands; neglected in Colonel Warleigh's time, even worse since by rascally tenants. Nearly bought it myself, but couldn't spare the money. Splendid investment; finest land in the whole district, finest water, finest grass. I ought to know.'

'It is most gratifying to hear a gentleman of your experience speak so highly of Warbrok,' said Mr. Effingham. 'Our good friend here has been the making of our fortunes.'

'Just like him! just like him!' said the new-comer, lighting a cigar and puffing out smoke and sentences with equal impetuosity. 'Always attending to other people's business; might have made his own fortune, two or three times over, if he'd taken my advice.'

'I know some one else who is tarred with the same brush,' returned the parson. 'Who bought in young Harding's place the other day, when his mortgagee sold him up, and re-sold it to him on the most Utopian terms? But shouldn't you like to walk round while you smoke your cigar this morning? We can pay our respects to the ladies afterwards.'

'Just the very thing. Many a time I've been here in the

old days. What a change! What a change! Bless my soul, how well the garden looks; never expected to see it bloom again! And the old house!—one would almost think Mrs. Warleigh was alive.'

'The best of wives and mothers,' said Mr. Sternworth with feeling. 'What a true lady and good Christian she was! If she had lived, there would have been a different household.'

'Daresay, daresay,' said Mr. Rockley meditatively. 'Precious rascals, the sons; hadn't much of a chance, perhaps. Wild lot here in those days, eh? So I see you have had that mound moved from the back of the cellar.'

'We couldn't think what it was,' said Mr. Effingham. 'The excavation must have been made long ago.'

'Not heard the story, then? Wonderful how some secrets are kept. Never mind, Sternworth, I won't tell Captain Effingham the *other* one. Randal Warleigh, the eldest son, was one of the wildest devils that even *this* country ever saw. Clever, handsome, but dissipated; reckless, unprincipled, in fact. Old man and he constantly quarrelling. Not that the Colonel was all that a father should have been, but he drank like a gentleman. Never touched anything before dinner. He finished his bottle of port then, and sometimes another, but no morning spirit-drinking. Would as soon have smoked a black pipe or worn a beard. It came to this at last, that when he went away he locked up sideboard and cellar, forbidding the housekeeper to give his sons any liquor.'

'The Colonel left home for a week in Yass, when Randal arrived with some cattle and two fellow-roysterers. No grog available. Naturally savage. Swore he would burn the old rookery down before he would submit to be treated so. Behaved like a madman. Ordered up his men, got picks and shovels, dug a tunnel under the cellar wall, and helped himself, *ad libitum*, to wine and spirits.'

'The governor's a soldier,' he said; 'I've given him a lesson in civil engineering. Here's his health, boys!'

'What an outrage!' said Mr. Effingham.

'You would have said so if you had seen Warbrok when the old gentleman returned. Every soul on the place—all convict servants in those days—had been drunk for a week. Cellar half-emptied, house in confusion. Randal and his

friends had betaken themselves, luckily, the day before, to the Snowy River, or there might have been murder done. As it was——'

'I think we may spare our friend any more chronicles of the good old times, Rockley; let us go down and see the dairy cows, those that Harry O'Desmond sold him.'

'All right!' said his friend good-humouredly, accepting the change of subject. 'I daresay Harry O' had his price, but they *are* the best cattle in the country.'

Mr. Rockley was equally hearty and complimentary as to the live stock. Didn't think he had ever seen finer cows, finer grass; he believed Mr. Effingham, if he went on as he was doing, would make a fortune by dairying. If old Colonel Warleigh had not been ignorant of rural matters, and his elder sons infernal low-lived scoundrels, a fortune would have been made before at Warbrok. Nothing could have prevented that family from becoming rich, with this estate for a home farm, and two splendid stations on Monaro, but the grossest mismanagement, incompetence, and vicious tendencies—he might say depravity—of course, he meant on the part of the young men. The Colonel was indiscreet—in fact, a d—d old fool—but everybody respected him.

The three gentlemen completed the round of the establishment, during which progress their mutual friend had praised the stock-yard, the wheat stack, the lake, the garden, and had pretty well exhausted his cigar-case. It was high noon in Warbrok, and the shelter of the broad verandah, which he eulogised by declaring it to be the finest verandah he had ever been under in his life, was distinctly grateful.

Upon his introduction to Mrs. Effingham and the young ladies, he was afflicted with an inability to express adequately his respectful admiration of the whole party. Everything elicited a cordial panegyric. It was apparent, even without the aid of a few guarded observations from Harley Sternworth, that Mr. Rockley's compliments arose from no weak intention of flattery, no foolish fondness or indiscriminate praise. It was simply the outpouring of a spring of benevolence which brimmed over in an important organ, which, for greater convenience in localising the emotions, is known as the heart. Longing to do good to all mankind, with perceptions of rare insight and keenness, much of Mr.

Rockley's philanthropy was necessarily confined to words. But when the opportunity arrived of translating good wishes into good deeds, few—very few—of the sons of men embarked in that difficult negotiation with half the pleasure, patience, and thoroughness of William Rockley.

The friends had not intended to stay the night, the time of a business man being limited, but upon invitation being pressingly made, first by Mrs. Effingham and then by the young ladies, one after another, Mr. Rockley declared that he couldn't resist such allurements, but that they must make a cruelly early start and get back to Yass to breakfast next day. He believed they would see him there often. Mrs. Rockley had not had the pleasure of calling upon Mrs. Effingham, because she had been away in Sydney visiting her children at school, as well as an aunt who was very ill —was always ill, he added impatiently. But she would drive over and see them, most likely next week; and whenever Mrs. Effingham and the young ladies came to Yass, or the Captain and his sons, they must make his house their home—indeed, he would be deeply offended if he heard of their going to an hotel.

'Well, really I'm afraid——'

'My dear sir,' interrupted Mr. Rockley, 'of course you meant what you said about the need of recreation for young people. Your sons have not had any since you came here, except an odd slap at a flock of ducks—and these Lake William birds are pretty shy. Then the ladies have hardly seen any one in the district, except the half-dozen men that have been to call. Don't you suppose it's natural that they should like to know the world they've come to live in?'

'We are such a large party, Mr. Rockley,' said Mrs. Effingham, who felt the necessity of being represented at this important council. 'It is extremely kind of you, but——'

'But look here, Mrs. Effingham,' interrupted Mr. Rockley with fiery impatience, so evidently habitual that she could not for a moment consider it to be disrespectful, 'don't you think it probable, in the nature of things, that you may visit Yass—which is your county town, remember—at the time of the races? All the world will be going. It's a time of year when there is nothing to do—as the parson here will

tell you. There will be balls, picnics, and parties for the young ladies—everything, in fact. *You must go*, you see that, surely? You'll be the only family of position in the country-side that won't be there. And if you go and don't make my house your home, instead of a noisy, rackety hotel, why—I'll never speak to one of you again.'

Here Mr. Rockley closed his rapidly delivered address, with a look of stern determination, which almost frightened Mrs. Effingham.

'You will really offend my good friend and his most amiable and hospitable lady if you do not accept his invitation,' said Mr. Sternworth. 'It is hardly an ordinary race-meeting so much as a periodical social gathering, of which a little racing (as in most English communities, and there never was one more thoroughly British than this) is the ostensible *raison d'être*.'

'Well, Howard, for the young people's sake, we really must think of it,' said Mrs. Effingham, answering, lest her husband, in distrust of a colonial gathering, might definitely decline. 'There will be time enough to apprise Mrs. Rockley before the event.'

'My wife will write to you when I get home,' said Mr. Rockley, 'and explain matters more fully than I can do.—Everything goes off pleasantly at our annual holiday, doesn't it, Harley?'

'So much so, that in my office of priest I have never had occasion to enter my protest. The people need a respite from the toils and privations of their narrow home world, almost more than we do.'

The evening passed most pleasantly. The parson and the soldier talked over old army days. While Mr. Rockley, who had been a squatter before finally settling down at Yass as principal merchant and banker, gave Wilfred and Guy practical advice. Then he assured Mrs. Effingham that at any time when she or the young ladies required change, they had only to write to Mrs. Rockley—or come, indeed, without writing—and make their house a home for as long as ever it suited them. Subsequently he declared that he had never heard any music in the least degree to be compared to the duet which Rosamond and Annabel executed for his especial benefit. He charmed Mrs. Effingham by telling

her that her son Wilfred was the most promising and sensible young man he had ever noticed as a beginner in the bush, and must infallibly do great things. Lastly, he begged that he might be provided with a cup of coffee at daylight, as, if he and Mr. Sternworth were not at Yass by breakfast-time, dreadful things might happen to the whole district. Annabel declared that she would get up and make it for him herself. Their visitors then retired for the night, all hands being in a high state of mutual appreciation.

'Your friend seems a most genial and sterling person, Harley,' said Mr. Effingham, as they indulged in a final stroll up the verandah, after the general departure. 'Is he always so complimentary?'

'He can be extremely the reverse, upon occasion; but he is, perhaps, the man of all others in whose good feeling I have the most undoubting faith. Under that impetuous, explosive manner, the outcome of a fervid, uncompromising nature, he carries an extraordinary talent for affairs, and one of the most generous hearts ever granted to mortal man. He has the soul of the Caliph Haroun Alraschid, and has secretly done more good deeds, to my knowledge, in this district than all the rest of us put together. His correct taste has enabled him to appreciate all my dear children here. From this time forth you may reckon upon a powerful, untiring friend in William Rockley.'

'I know *one* friend, Harley,' said Effingham as their hands met in a parting grasp, 'who has been more than a brother to me in my hour of need. We can never divide the gratitude which is your due from me and mine.'

'Pooh! pooh! a man wants more friends than one, especially in Australia, where a season of adversity—which means a dry one—may be hanging over him; and a better one than William Rockley will be to you, henceforth, no man ever saw or heard of. Good-night!'

So passed the happy days of the first early summer-time at Warbrok—days which knew no change until the great festival of Christmas approached, which closes the year in all England's dependencies with hallowed revelry and honoured mirth. Christmas was imminent. The 20th of December had arrived; a day of mingled joy and sorrow, as more freshly, vividly came back the buried memories of

old days, the echo of the lost chimes of English Christmas bells. But in spite of such natural feelings, the advent of Christmas was not suffered to pass without tokens of gladness and services of thanksgiving.

It had been decided to invite Messrs. Hamilton and Argyll, with Mr. Churbett and Mr. Forbes, to join the modest family festivities on this occasion. Old Tom had been duly despatched with the important missives, and the invitations were frankly accepted.

On the 24th of December, therefore, late in the afternoon, which is the regulation hour for calling in Australian country society, the visitor being aware that he is expected to stay all night, and not desiring, unless he is *very* young, to have more than an hour to dispose of before dinner, the gentlemen aforesaid rode up. They had met by appointment and made the expedition together.

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'Fancy this being Christmas Day!' exclaimed Annabel, as —the time-honoured greetings being uttered — the whole party disposed themselves comfortably around the breakfast-table. 'And what a lovely fresh morning! Not a hot-wind day, as old Dick said it would be. It makes me shiver when I think of how we were wrapped up this time last year.'

'Are you certain it *is* Christmas, Miss Annabel?' said Fred Churbett; 'I doubt it, because of the absence of holly and snow, and old women and school children, and waits and the parish beadle—all the belongings of our forefathers. There *must* be some mistake. The sun is too fast, depend upon it. I must write to the *Times*.'

'Old Dick brought a load of scarlet-flowering bushes from the hills yesterday,' said Rosamond, 'with which he solemnly decorated his hut and our verandah pillars. He wished to make Andrew a present of a few branches as a peace-offering, but he declined, making some indignant remark about Prelatism or Erastianism, which Dick did not understand.'

At eleven o'clock A.M. a parade of the 'full strength of the regiment,' as Effingham phrased it, was ordered. Chairs, with all things proper, and a reading-desk, had been arranged on the south side of the wide verandah.

To this gathering-point the different members of the establishment had been gradually converging, arrayed in

garments, which, if varying from the fashion-plates of the day, were neat, suitable, and of perfect cleanliness. Mrs. Evans's skill as a laundress, which was in the inverse ratio to her mildness of disposition, enabled Dick to appear in white duck trousers and a shirt-front which distanced all rivalry. They contrasted strongly with the unbroken tint of brick-dust red presented by his face and throat, the latter encircled by an ancient military stock. Mrs. Evans was attired with such splendour that it was manifest she had sacrificed comfort to fashion.

'Old Tom' had donned, as suitable for the grandeur and solemnity of the occasion, a well-worn pair of cord breeches, the gift of some employer of sporting tendencies, which, 'a world too wide for his shrunk shanks,' were met at the knee by carefully polished boots, the long-vanished tops being replaced by moleskin caps. A drill overshirt, fastened at the waist with a broad leather belt, from which depended a tobacco-pouch, completed this effective costume. The iron-grey hair was carefully combed back from his withered countenance; his keen eyes gleamed from their hollow orbits, imparting an appearance of mysterious vitality to the ancient stock-rider.

Andrew and Jeanie, of course, attended, the latter dressed with the good taste which always characterised her, and the former having in charge the sturdy silent Duncan, with their younger offspring. Of these, Jessie bade fair to furnish a favourable type of the 'fair-haired lassie' so frequently met with in the ballads of her native land, while Colin, the second boy, was a clever, confident youngster, in whose intelligence Andrew secretly felt pride, though he repressed with outward sternness all manifestations of the same.

Andrew himself, it must be stated, appeared under protest, holding that 'thae Yerastian, prelatic festivals,' in his opinion, 'were no warranted by the General Assembly o' the Kirk o' Scotland, natheless, being little mair than dwellers in the wilderness, it behoved a' Christians, though they should be but a scattered remnant in the clefts o' the rocks, to agree in bearing testimony to the Word.'

Across the broad verandah the members of the family, with their visitors, were seated, behind them the retainers. A table covered with a cloth was placed before Mr. Effing-

ham, with the family Bible and a prayer-book of the Church of England.

As he made commencement, and with the words, 'When the wicked man turneth away,' the congregation stood up, it was a matter of difficulty with Mrs. Effingham to restrain her tears. How the well-remembered sentences seemed to smite the rock of her well-guarded emotions as with the rod of the Prophet! She trembled lest the spring should break forth from her o'erburdened heart, whelming alike prudence and the sense of fitness. The eyes of the girls were dewy, as they recalled the white-robed, long-remembered pastor, the ivy-covered church, storied with legend and memorial of their race, the villagers, the friends of their youth, the unquestioned security of position, long guaranteed by habit and usage, apparently unalterable. And now, where stood they, while the sacred words proceeded from the lips of the head of the household, whom they had followed to this far land?

In a 'lodge in the wilderness,' a speck in a 'boundless contiguity of shade,' with its unfamiliar adjuncts and a company of strangers—pilgrims and wayfarers—even as they. For a brief interval the suddenly realised picture of distance and isolation was so real, the momentary pang of bitterness so keenly agonising, that more than one sob was heard, while Annabel, whose feelings were less habitually under control, threw her arms round Jeanie's neck (who had nursed her as a babe) and wept unrestrainedly.

No notice was taken of this natural outburst of emotion. Jeanie, with unobtrusive tenderness and unfailing tact, comforted the weeping girl. Solemnly the words of the service sounded from her father's lips, while the ordinary responses concealed the occasional sobs of the mourner for home and native land. She had unconsciously translated the unspoken words of more disciplined hearts.

Gradually, as the service continued, the influences of the scene exercised a healing power upon the group—the fair, golden day, the tender azure of the sky, the wandering breeze, the waters of the lake lapping the shore, the whispering of the waving trees, even the hush of

> Beautiful silence all around,
> Save wood-bird to wood-bird calling,

commenced insensibly to soothe the hearts of the exiles. Gradually their faces recovered serenity, and as the repetitions of belief and trust, of submission to a Supreme Benevolence, were repeated, that 'peace which passeth all understanding,' an indwelling guest with some, a memory, a long-forgotten visitant with others, appeared for a space to have enveloped the little company on that day assembled at Warbrok.

The simply-conducted service was verging on conclusion when a stranger appeared upon the track from the high road. In bushman's dress, and carrying upon his back the ordinary knapsack (or 'swag') of the travelling labourer, he strode along the path at a pace considerably higher in point of speed than is usual with men who, as a class, being confident of free quarters at every homestead, see no necessity for haste. A tall, powerfully-built man, his sun-bronzed countenance afforded no clue to his social qualification.

Halting at the garden gate, he stood suddenly arrested as he comprehended the occupation of the assembled group. He looked keenly around, then easing the heavy roll by a motion of his shoulders, awaited the final benediction.

'What is your business with me?' said Mr. Effingham, closing his book, and regarding with interest the stranger, whose bold dark eyes roved around, now over the assembled company, now over the buildings and offices, and lastly settled with half-admiration, half-diffidence, on the bright faces of the girls. 'I have no employment here at present. Perhaps you would like to stay to-night. You are heartily welcome.'

'Come along o' me, young man,' interposed Dick Evans, as promptly divining the wayfarer's habitudes. 'Come along o' me; you'll have a share of our Christmas dinner, and you might come by a worse.'

'All right,' replied the stranger cheerfully, and with a nod of acknowledgment to Mr. Effingham he jerked back his personal effects into their position and strode after his interlocutor, who, with old Tom Glendinning, quitted the party, leaving Mrs. Evans to follow at her convenience.

'Fine soldier that man would have made,' said Mr. Effingham, as he marked the well-knit frame, the elastic step of the stranger. 'I wonder what his occupation is?'

'Horse-breaker, bullock-driver, station hand of some sort,' said Argyll indifferently. 'Just finished a job of splitting, probably, or is bringing his shearing cheque to get rid of in Yass.'

'He appeared to have seen better days, poor fellow,' said Mrs. Effingham, ever compassionate. 'I noticed a wistful expression in his eyes when he first came up.'

'I thought he looked proud and disdainful,' said Annabel, 'and when old Dick said "come along," I half expected him to reply indignantly. But he went off readily enough. I wonder if he's a gentleman in disguise?'

'Or a bushranger,' suggested Churbett. 'Donohoe is "out" just now, and is said to have a new hand with him. These gentry have been occasionally entertained, like angels, unawares.'

'What a shocking idea!' exclaimed Annabel. 'You have no sentiment, Mr. Churbett. How would *you* like to be suspected by everybody if you were reduced to poverty? He is very handsome, at any rate.'

'Fred would be too lazy to walk, that is one thing certain, Miss Annabel,' said Hamilton. 'He would prefer to take the situation of cook or hut-keeper at a quiet station, where there were no children. Fancy his coming up, touching his hat respectfully, and saying, "I suppose you haven't a berth about the kitchen as would suit a pore man, Miss?"'

Here the speaker gave so capital an imitation of Mr. Churbett's accented tone in conversation that everybody laughed, including the subject of the joke, who said it was just like Hamilton's impudence, but that *other* people occasionally had mistakes made as to their station in life. What about old M'Callum sending him and Argyll to pass the night in the men's hut?

'The old ruffian!' said Argyll, surprised out of his usual serenity, 'I had two minds to knock him down; another, to tell him he was an ignorant savage; and a fourth, to camp under a gum-tree.'

'What did you do finally?' asked Rosamond, much interested. 'What an awkward position to be placed in.'

'The night happened to be wet,' explained Hamilton; 'we had ridden far, and were *so* hungry—no other place of abode within twenty miles; so—it was very unheroic—

but we had to put our pride in our pockets, and sleep, or rather *stay*, in an uncomfortable hut, with half-a-dozen farm-servants.'

'What a bore!' said Wilfred. 'Did he know your names? It seems inconceivable.'

'The real truth was,' said Mr. Churbett, volunteering an explanation, 'that the old man, taking umbrage somewhere at what he considered our friend Hamilton's superfine manners and polite habit of banter, had vowed to serve him and Argyll out if ever they came his way. This was how he carried out his dark and dreadful oath.'

'What a terrible person!' exclaimed Annabel, opening her eyes. 'Were you very miserable, Mr. Hamilton?'

'Sufficiently so, I am afraid, to have made our friend chuckle if he had known. We had to ride twenty miles before we saw a hair-brush again, and Argyll, I must say, looked dishevelled.'

A simultaneous inclination to laughter seized the party, as they gazed with one accord at Argyll's curling locks.

'I should think that embarrassments might arise,' said Mr. Effingham, 'from the habit of claiming hospitality when travelling here. There are inns, I suppose, but they are infrequent.'

'Not so many mistakes are made as one might think,' explained Churbett. 'Squatters' names are widely known, even out of their districts, and every one accepts a night's lodging frankly, as he expects to give one in return.'

'But how can we know whether the stranger be a gentleman, or even a respectable person?' said Mrs. Effingham. 'One would be so sorry to be unkind, and yet might be led into entertaining undesirable guests.'

'Every gentleman should send in his card,' said Argyll, 'if he wishes to be received, or give his name and address to the servant. People who will not so comply with the usages of society have no right to consideration.'

'But suppose people are not well dressed,' said Wilfred, 'or are outwardly unlike gentlemen, what are you to do? It would be annoying to make mistakes in either way.'

'When people are not dressed like gentlemen,' said Hamilton, 'you may take it for granted that they have forfeited their position, or are contented to be treated as

steerage passengers, so to speak. In such cases the safer plan, as far as my experience goes, is to permit them to please themselves. I had a good look at our friend yonder, as he came up, and I have a shrewd suspicion that he belongs to the latter category.'

'Poor young man!' said Mrs. Effingham. 'Couldn't anything be done for him? Think of a son of ours being placed in that position!'

'He is making himself comfortable with old Dick Evans, most likely, however unromantic it may appear,' said Churbett. 'He will enjoy his dinner—I daresay he hasn't had many good ones lately—have a great talk with Dick and the old stock-rider, and smoke his pipe afterwards with much contentment.'

'But a *gentleman*, if he be a gentleman, never could lower himself to such surroundings, surely?' queried Rosamond. 'It is not possible.'

'Oh yes, it *is*,' said Beatrice. 'Because, you remember, Sergeant Bothwell was more comfortable in the butler's room with old John Gudyill than he would have been with Lady Bellenden and her guests, though she longed to entertain him suitably, on account of his royal blood.'

'Miss Beatrice, I congratulate you on your familiarity with dear Sir Walter,' said Argyll. 'It is a case perfectly in point, because Francis Stewart, otherwise Bothwell, had at one time mixed in the society of the day, and must have had the manners befitting his birth. Nevertheless in his lapsed condition he preferred the *sans gêne* of his inferiors. There are many such in Australia, who "have sat at good men's feasts," but are now, unfortunately, more at ease in the men's hut.'

'Of course you've heard of Carl Hotson, the man they used to call "the Count"?' said Hamilton. 'No? He lived at Carlsruhe, on the other side of the range, near the Great South Gap, where every one was obliged to pass, and (there being no inn) stay all night. Now "the Count" was a fastidious person of literary tastes. He chafed against entertaining a fresh batch of guests every night. "Respectable persons—aw—I am informed, but—aw—I don't keep an hotel!" Unwilling to be bored, and yet anxious not to be churlish, he took a middle course. He invented "the

stranger's hut," which has since obtained in other parts of the country.'

'Whatever was that?' asked Guy.

'He had a snug cottage built at a short distance from the road. Into this dwelling every traveller, without introduction, was ushered. A good dinner, with bed and breakfast, was supplied. His horse was paddocked, and in the morning the guest, suitably entertained, but ignorant of the personnel of the proprietor, as in a castle of romance, was free to depart.'

'And a very good idea it was,' said Mr. Effingham. 'I can imagine one becoming tired of casual guests.'

'Some people were not of that opinion,' said Mr. Forbes, 'declaring it to be in contravention of the custom of the country. One evening Dr. Portman, an elderly gentleman, of majestic demeanour, came to Carlsruhe. He relied on a colonial reputation to procure him unusual privileges, but not receiving them, wrote a stiff note to Mr. Hotson, regretting his inability to thank him personally for his peculiar hospitality, and enclosing a cheque for a guinea in payment of the expense incurred.'

'What did "the Count" say to that?'

'He was equal to the occasion. The answer was as follows:—

'SIR—I have received a most extraordinary letter signed J. D. Portman, enclosing a cheque for one guinea. The latter document I have transmitted to the Treasurer of the Lunatic Asylum.—Obediently yours, CARL HOTSON.'

The Christmas dinner, which included a noble wild turkey, a fillet of veal, a baron of beef, with two brace of black duck, as well as green peas, cauliflowers, and early potatoes from the now productive garden, was a great success. Cheerful and contented were those who sat around the board. Merry and well-sustained was the flow of badinage, which kept the young people amused and amusing. In the late afternoon the guests excused themselves, and left for home, alleging that work commenced early on the morrow, and that they were anxious as to the results of universal holiday-making.

CHAPTER IX

HUBERT WARLEIGH, YR., OF WARBROK

NEXT morning early, Mr. Effingham was enjoying the fresh, cool air when Dick marched up to him.

'Well, Evans,' said Effingham, 'Christmas Day is over. Tell me, were you able to abstain?'

'Believe me, I got drunk, sir,' answered the veteran, 'but I'm all right now till New Year's Day.'

'I am afraid that your constitution will suffer, Evans, if you continue these regular—or rather irregular—excesses.'

'Can't say for that, sir. Been drunk every Christmas since the year as I 'listed in the old rigiment; but I wanted to tell you about that young man as was in our hut last night. Do you know who he is, sir?'

'No, indeed, Evans! I suspected he was no ordinary station-hand.'

'Well, no, sir; that's the youngest of the old Colonel's sons. Him as they used to call "Gyp" Warleigh. He was allers fond of ramblin' and campin' out, from a boy, gipsy fashion. When the Colonel died, he went right away to some of the far-out stations beyond Monaro, and never turned up for years. Old Tom knowed him at once, but didn't let on.'

'Poor fellow! How hard that he should have come back to his father's house penniless and poorly clad. I wonder if we could find him employment here?'

'H—m! I don't know, sir; we haven't much to keep hands goin' at this season, but you can see him yourself. I daresay he'll come up to thank you afore he goes.'

Dick's conjecture proved true, inasmuch as before the breakfast bell rang the prodigal walked up to the garden gate.

This time he underwent a more careful examination, the result of which was to impress the master of the house in a favourable manner. Though dressed much as before, there was some improvement in his appearance. He came forward now, with the advantage conferred by rest and good entertainment. His regular features, as Mr. Effingham now thought, showed plainly the marks of aristocratic lineage. The eyes, especially, were bold and steadfast, while his figure, hardened by the toils of a backwoods life, in its grand outline and muscular development, aroused the admiration of a professional connoisseur. The bronzed face had lost its haggard expression, and it was with a frank smile that he raised his hat slightly and said, 'Good-morning, sir. I have come to thank you for your kindness and hospitality.'

'I am pleased to have been enabled to afford it,' said the master of the establishment; 'but is there nothing more that I can do for your father's son?'

The man started; a frown set the lower part of his face in rigid sternness. After a moment's pause the cloud-like expression cleared, and with softened voice he said:

'I see they have told you. I thought the old stock-rider knew me; he was here before we lived at Warbrok. Yes, it is all true. I am Hubert Warleigh.'

Mr. Effingham's impulsive heart was stirred within him, at these words, to a degree which he himself would hardly have admitted. The actual presentment of this cadet of an old family—once the object of a mother's care, a mother's prayers—fallen from his position and compelled to wander over the country, meanly dressed and carrying a burden in this hot weather, touched him to the heart. He walked up to the speaker, and laying his hand upon his arm, said in tones of deep feeling:

'My dear fellow, will you let me advise you, as I should thank any Christian man to do for my son in like need? Stay with us for a time. I may be able to assist you indirectly, if not otherwise. At the worst, the hospitality of this house—of your old home—is open to you as long as you please to accept it.'

'You are kind—too kind, sir,' said the wanderer, while his bold eyes softened, and for a moment he turned his face towards the lake. 'The old place makes me feel like a boy

again. But it will never do—*it's too late*. You don't know the ways of this country yet, and you might come to repent being so soft—I mean so good-natured.'

'I will take the risk,' persisted Effingham. 'Let me see you restored to your proper standing in society, and following any occupation befitting a gentleman, and I shall hold myself fully repaid.'

The stranger smiled, half-sadly, half-humorously, as he seated himself on a fence-rail.

'That is not so easy as you think, sir,' he said. 'Though there's very few people in this country would bother about trying. When a fellow's been rambling about the bush, working and living with the men, for years and years, it is not so easy to turn him into a gentleman again. Worst of all when he's come short of education, and has half-forgotten how to behave himself before ladies. Ladies! I swear, when I saw your daughters, looking like rosebuds in the old verandah, I felt like a blackfellow.'

'That a feeling of—of rusticity—would be one of the consequences of a roving life, I can understand; but you are young—a mere boy yet. Believe one who has seen something of the world, that the awkwardness you refer to would soon disappear were you once more among your equals.'

'Too late—too late!' said the man gloomily. 'Gyp Warleigh must remain in the state he has brought himself to. I know him better than you do, worse luck! There's another reason why I'm afraid to trust myself in a decent house.'

'Good heavens!' said Effingham. 'Then what is that? You surely have not——'

'Taken to the bush? Not yet; but it's best to be straight. I learned the trick of turning up my little finger too early and too well; and though I'm right enough for months when I'm far in the bush, or have had a spell of work, I'm helpless when the drinking fit comes on me. I *must* have it, if I was to die twenty times over. And the worst of it is, I can feel it coming creeping on me for weeks beforehand; I can no more fight it off than a man who's half-way down a range can stop himself. But it's no use talking—I must be off. How well the old place looks! It's a grand season, certainly.'

'You have had adventures here in the old days,' said

Effingham, willing to lead him into conversation. 'Had you a fight with bush-rangers in the dining-room ever?'

'Then the bullet-marks *are* there yet?' said the stranger carelessly. 'Well, there was wild work at Warbrok when that was done, but bushrangers had no say in it. It was the old governor who blazed away there. He was always a two-bottle man, was the governor, and after poor mother died he scarcely ever went to bed sober. Randal and Clem were terrible wild chaps, or they might have kept matters together. I was the youngest, and let do pretty much as I liked. I never learned anything except to read and write badly. Always in the men's huts, I picked up all the villainy going before I was fourteen. But about those bullet-marks in the wall.'

'I feel deeply interested, believe me; and if you would permit me to repair the neglect you have experienced, something may yet be done.'

'You don't know men of my sort, Captain, or you wouldn't talk in that way. Not that I haven't a feeling towards you that I've never had since poor mother died, and told me to be a good boy, as she stroked my hair for the last time. But how could I? What chance is there for a lad in the bush, living as we did in those days? I remember Randal's coming home from Bathurst races—he'd go any distance to a race meeting. He was like a madman. It was then that the row came about with the governor, when they nearly shot one another.'

'Nearly shot one another! Good heavens! How *could* that happen?'

'After the cellar racket Randal had the sense to stay away at Monaro and work at our station there for months. He could work when he liked, and a smarter man among stock never handled a slip-rail. But he had to come home at last. The governor talked to him most polite. Hoped he'd stay to dinner. He drank fair; they were well into the fourth bottle when the row began. He told us afterwards that the old man, instead of flying into a rage, as usual, was bitter and cool, played with him a bit, but finished up by saying that "though it was the worst day's work he ever did to come to this accursed country, he hardly expected his eldest son would turn out a burglar and a thief."

'Randal was off his head by this time—been "a bit on"

before he came—swore he wouldn't stand that from any man, not even his own father. The old man glared at him like a tiger, and fetching out the loaded duelling pistols, which people always had handy in those days, gave him one, and they stood up at different ends of the long room.

'We heard the shots and rushed in. There was Randal holding on by the wall, swaying about, and, pointing to the ceiling, saying, as well as he could, "Fired in the air! by ——! fired in—the—air!" Sure enough, there was the mark of his bullet in the ceiling, but the *other one* had hit the wall, barely an inch from Randal's head.'

'What an awful affair! How your father must have rejoiced that he was spared the guilt of such a crime.'

'I don't know about that; all he *said* next day was, that his hand must have been shaky, or he would have rid the world of an infernal scoundrel, who had disgraced his family and was no son of his. He never spoke to him again.'

'Miserable father—lost son! What became of your brothers, may I ask, since you have told me so much?'

'Randal was in a vessel coming back from Adelaide with an exploring party. He'd been lushing pretty heavy, and they thought he must have gone overboard one night in a fit of the horrors. Anyhow, he was never seen alive afterwards. Poor Clem—he wasn't half as bad as Randal, only easy led—died at the Big River: was shepherding when we last heard of him. I'm all that's left of the Warleighs. Some fine day you'll hear of me being drowned crossing a river, or killed by the blacks, or broke my neck off a horse; and a good job too. I must be off now. It's years since I've said as much to any one.'

'But why—why not stay and commence a happier career? Scores of men have done so, years after your age. You will have encouragement from every member of my family.'

'Family!' answered the outcast, with a bitter smile. 'Am I fit to associate with *ladies?* Why, even while I'm speaking to you I can hardly open my mouth without an oath or a rough word. No! It might have been once; it's years too late now. But I thank you all the same; and if ever a chance comes in my way of doing your people a good turn, you may depend your life on Gyp Warleigh. Good-bye, sir!'

As he rose to his feet, squaring his shoulders and towering to the full height of his stature, Mr. Effingham instinctively held out his hand. Closing his own upon it for one moment in an iron grasp, the wanderer strode forth upon his path, and was lost behind a turn in the timber.

Howard Effingham returned to his household filled with sad thought. He had seen ruined men of all sorts and kinds before; had known many who, with every social aid and endowment, had chosen to tread the path of degradation. But there was, to his mind, an element of unusual pathos in this acquiescent yet resentful debasement of a noble nature. In the hall he met Wilfred and Guy. Contrasting their frank, untroubled countenances with that of the ill-fated son of his predecessor his heart swelled with thankfulness.

'What a long talk you have been having with our dark friend,' said Wilfred. 'Does he want a situation as stock-rider? or has he a project requiring the aid of a little capital? He doesn't look like an enthusiast.'

'Nor is he one,' answered the father briefly. 'He is an unhappy man, whom you will compassionate when I tell you that he is Hubert Warleigh—the Colonel's youngest son.'

'Good heavens!' cried Wilfred. 'Who said there was no romance in a new country? I thought he was a fine-looking fellow, with something uncommon about him. What a history!'

'What a dreadful, what an astonishing thing!' exclaimed Annabel, who, having an appetite for novelty, and seldom being so absorbed in her household duties as to escape early notice of such, had joined the group. 'To think that that sunburned, roughly-dressed man, carrying a bundle with his blanket and all kinds of things, should be a gentleman, the son of an old officer; just like Wilfred and Guy here! To be sure, he *was* handsome, in spite of his disguise; and did you notice what splendid black eyes he had? Poor fellow, poor fellow! Why didn't you make him stay, papa?'

'My child! I did try to persuade him; I promised to see what we could do for him. My heart yearned to the youngster, thinking that if, in the bounds of possibility, any child of mine was in such evil case, so might some father's heart turn to him in his need. But he only said it was too late, with a

kind of proud regret. Yet I think he was grateful, for he wrung my hand at parting, said it had done him good to speak with me, and if he could ever do us a service I might count upon him.'

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In the dreamy days of the late summer one and all derived great solace and enjoyment from the Lake William Book Club, now become, thanks to Mr. Churbett's brother in London, a working institution. That gentleman had forwarded a well-selected assortment, comprising the newest publications of the day, in various departments of literature, not forgetting a judicious sprinkling of fiction. The books brought out by the family, neither few nor of humble rank, had been read and re-read until they were known by heart. This fresh store-house of knowledge was, for the first time in their lives, truly appreciated.

Mr. Churbett had employed himself in his solitary hours in covering with strong white paper and carefully entitling each volume. These he divided into 'sets,' comprising, say, a modicum of history, travel, biography, or science, with a three-volume novel. The sets being duly numbered, a sketch circuit was calculated, and proper arrangements made. He, for instance, forwarded a set to Benmohr, whence they were enjoined to forward them at the expiration of a month to The Chase; at the same time receiving a fresh supply from head-quarters. O'Desmond sent them on to the Snowdens, to be despatched by them to Mr. Hampden at Wangarua. So it came to pass that when the twelfth subscriber forwarded the first-mentioned set to its original dwelling-place at Mr. Churbett's, the year had completed its cycle, and each household had had ample, but not over-abundant, time to thoroughly master the contents of their dole of literature.

The autumn month of March was chiefly characterised by the rural population of the district, as being the season in which was held the Annual Yass Race Meeting. This tournament was deservedly popular in an English-speaking community. There was no wife, widow, or maid, irrespectively of the male representatives, who did not feel a mild interest in the Town Plate, the delightfully dangerous Steeplechase, and finally in the 'Ladies' Bag.' This thrilling

event comprised a collection of fancy-work—slippers, embroidered smoking-caps, and gorgeous cigar-cases, suitable for masculine use or ornament.

The coveted prize was fabricated by the fair hands of the dames and damsels of the district. The race was confined to amateurs, and those only were permitted to compete who had received invitations from the Secretary of the Ladies' Committee.

Great interest was taken, it may be supposed, in the carrying-off of this trophy, and many a youthful aspirant might be seen 'brushing with hasty step the dew away,' as he reviewed at dawn his training arrangements with a face of anxiety, such as might become the owner of a Derby favourite.

By direct or devious ways the echoes of battle-cries, proper to the approaching fray, commenced to reach The Chase. Faintly interested as had been the family in the probable pleasures of such an assemblage, they could not remain wholly insensible. With each succeeding week tidings and murmurs of the Carnival swelled into sonorous tone. One day a couple of grooms, leading horses sheeted and hooded, of which the satin skins and delicate limbs bore testimony to their title to blue blood, would pass by on their way to Yass; or Mr. Churbett would ride over with the latest news, declaring that Grey Surrey was in such condition that no horse in the district had a chance with him, though Hamilton's No Mamma had notoriously been in training for a month longer. Also, that the truly illustrious steeplechaser, The Cid, had been stabled at Badajos for the night; but that, in his opinion, he could not be held at his fences, and if so, St. Andrew would make such an exhibition of him as would astonish his backers and the Tasmanian division generally. Then Mrs. Snowden would arrive to lunch, and among other items of intelligence volunteer the information that the ball, which the Racing Club Committee was pledged to give this year, would exceed in magnificence all previous entertainments. Borne on the wings of the weekly post there came a missive from Mrs. Rockley, reminding Mrs. Effingham of her promise to come and bring her daughters for the race week, assuring her that rooms at Rockley Lodge awaited them, and that wilful child Christabel

was prepared to die of grief in the event of anything preventing their having the pleasure of their company.

Then Bob Clarke was, after all, to ride The Cid. He was the only man that could hold him at his fences. So there would be such a set-to between him and St. Andrew, with Charlie Hamilton up, as had never been seen in the district. The western division were going to back The Cid to the clothes on their back. Hamilton was a cool hand across country, and a good amateur jock wherever you put him up, but Bob Clarke, who had had his early training among the stiff four-railers and enclosed pasture-lands of Tasmania, was an extraordinary horseman, and had a way of getting a beaten horse over his last fences which stamped him as the man to put your money on.

It was not in human nature altogether to disregard current opinions, which, in default of more important public events, swayed the pastoral community as well as the dwellers in the rural townships. The Effinghams gradually abandoned themselves to the stream, and decided to accept Mrs. Rockley's invitation for the lady part of the family. To this end Wilfred made a flying visit to the town, where he had been promptly taken in custody by Mr. Rockley and lodged in safe keeping at his hospitable mansion.

He returned with what Beatrice called a rose-coloured description of the whole establishment; notably of the marvellous beauty of Christabel Rockley, the only daughter.

'Why, you haven't seen girls for I don't know how long,' said Annabel, 'except us, of course—and you don't see any beauty in fair people—so how can you tell? The first young woman with a pale face and dark eyes is a vision of loveliness, of course. Wait till *we* go to Yass, and you will hear a proper description.'

'Women are always unsympathetic about one another, he retorted. 'That's the reason one can hardly trust the best woman's portrait of her friend.'

'And men are so credulous,' said Beatrice. 'I wonder any sensible woman has the patience to appropriate one. See how they admire the merest chits with the beauty of a china doll, and so very, *very* little more brains. There is a nice woman, I admit, here and there, but a man doesn't know her when he sees her.'

'All this is premature,' said the assaulted brother, trying to assume an air of philosophical serenity. 'I know nothing about Miss Christabel save and except that she is "beautiful exceedingly," like the dame in Coleridge. But you will find Mr. Rockley's the nicest house to stay in, or I much mistake, that you have been in of late years, and, in a general way, you will enjoy yourselves more than you expect.'

'I expect *great things*,' said Annabel, 'and I intend to enjoy myself immensely. Fancy, what a pleasure it will be to me to see quantities of new people! Even Rosamond confessed to me that she felt interested in our coming glimpse of Australian society. We *have* been a good deal shut up, and it will do us good; even Beatrice will fall across a new book or a fresh character to read, which comes to much the same thing. I prefer live characters myself.'

'And I prefer the books,' said Beatrice; 'there's such a dreadful amount of time lost in talking to people, very often, about such wretched commonplaces. You can't skip their twaddle or gossip, and you can in a book.'

CHAPTER X

A PROVINCIAL CARNIVAL

The last week of March at length arrived, by which time the nights had grown perceptibly colder, and the morning air was by no means so mild as to render wraps unnecessary.

No rain had fallen for some weeks, though before that time there had been a succession of showers; so that, there being no dust, while the weather was simply perfect, the grass green, and the sky cloudless, a more untoward time might have been selected for recreation.

It was indeed the carnival of a community of uncompromising toilers, as were, in good sooth, the majority of the inhabitants of the town and district of Yass.

Not without misgiving did Wilfred consent to leave the homestead entirely to itself. Yet he told himself that, while the farm and dairy were in the hands of such capable persons as Dick Evans, old Tom, and Andrew, without some kind of social or physical earthquake, no damage could occur.

Dick, in spite of his love of excitement, did not care to attend this race meeting. Aware of his weakness, he was unwilling to enter on a fresh bout of dissipation before the effects of the last one had faded from recollection. 'I looks to have a week about Michaelmas,' said he, as gravely as if he had been planning a hunting or fishing excursion, 'then I reckon to hold on till after harvest, or just afore Christmas comes in. Two sprees a year is about the right thing for a man that knows himself. I don't hold with knockin' about bars and shanties.'

Crede old Tom, the last Yass races had chiefly impressed

themselves on his mind as a festivity wherein he spent 'thirty-seven pounds ten in six days, and broke his collar-bone riding a hurdle race. Whether he was getting older he could not say, but he felt as if he did not care to go in just now. He was going to keep right till next Christmas, when, of course, any man worth calling a man would naturally go in for a big drink.'

For far other reasons, and in widely differing language, did Andrew Cargill protest his disinclination to join revelries which, based on the senseless sport of horse-racing, he felt to be indefensible, immoral, and worthy only of the heathen, who were so unsparingly extirpated by the children of Israel. 'I haena words to express my scorn for thae fearless follies, and I thocht that the laird and the mistress wad ha' had mair sense than to gang stravaigin' ower the land like a wheen player-bodies to gie their coontenance to siccan snares o' Beelzebub. It's juist fearsome.'

Conflict of opinion in this case resulted in similarity of action, inasmuch as the two unregenerates, conscious that their hour was not yet come, conducted themselves with the immaculate propriety nowhere so apparent as in those Australian labourers who are confessedly saving themselves up for a 'burst.'

Nothing could have been descried upon this lower earth more deeply impressive than the daily walk of these two ancient reprobates, as Andrew, in his heart, always designated them.

The sun never saw them in bed. Old Tom had his morning smoke while tracking the nightly wandering dairy cows long before that luminary concerned himself with the inhabitants of the district. As day was fairly established, the cows were in the yard, and the never-ending work of milking commenced. Andrew's northern perseverance was closely taxed to keep pace in the daily duties of the farm with these two swearing, tearing old sinners.

All preliminaries having been concluded, which Mrs. Effingham declared fell but little short of those which preceded their emigration, the grand departure was made for their country town in what might justly be considered to be high state and magnificence.

First of all rode Rosamond and Beatrice on their favourite palfreys. Touching the stud question, Wilfred and Guy had

gradually developed the love of horses, which is inseparable from Australian country life. The indifferent nags upon which the girls had taken their early riding lessons had, by purchase or exchange, been replaced by superior animals. Rosamond, whose nerve was singularly good, and whose 'hands' had reached a finish rarely accorded to the gentler sex, was the show horsewoman of the family, being entrusted with the education of anything doubtful before the younger girls were suffered to risk the mount. She rode a slight, aristocratic-looking dark bay, of a noble equine family, which, like themselves, had not long quitted the shores of Britain. Discharged from a training-stable upon the charge of unfitness to 'stay,' he had fallen into unprofessional hands, from which Wilfred had rescued him, giving in exchange a fat stock-horse and a trifle more 'boot' than he was ready to acknowledge. He had been right in thinking that in the delicate head, the light arched neck, the rarely oblique shoulder, the undeniable look of blood, he saw sufficient guarantee for a peerless light-weight hackney. This in despite of a general air of height rather than stability, which caused the severe critics of Benmohr and The She-oaks to speak of him as being unduly 'on the leg.'

There are some metals which compensate in quality for lack of weight and substance; so among horses we find those which, indomitable of spirit and tireless of muscle, are capable of wearing out their more solidly-built compeers. To such a class belonged 'dear Fergus,' as Rosamond always called the matchless hackney with which Wilfred had presented her. Gay and high-couraged, temperate, easy, safe, fast, with a walk and canter utterly unapproachable, the former, indeed, assimilating to the unfair speed of a 'pacer,' while the latter was free, floating, graceful, and elastic as that of the wild deer, he was a steed to dream of, to love and cherish in life, to mourn over in death. Many an hour, in the gathering twilight, by the shores of the lake, had Rosamond revelled in, mounted upon this pink of perfection, when Wilfred jumped upon a fresh horse after his day's work and called upon his sister to come for her evening ride. How anxiously, after the lingering, glaring afternoon, did Rosamond watch for the time which brought the chief luxury of the day, when she lightly reined the deer-like Fergus as he sped through

the twilight shadows, over the greensward by the lake shore.

Beatrice had also her favourite, which, though of different style and fashion, was yet an undeniable celebrity. A small iron-grey mare, scarce above pony height, was Allspice, with a great flavour of the desert-born, from which she traced her descent, in the wide nostril, high croup, and lavish action. Guy picked her up at a cattle muster, where he was amazed at seeing the ease with which she carried a thirteen-stone stock-rider through the ceaseless galloping of a day's 'cutting-out.' Asking permission to get on her back, he at once discovered her paces, and never rested till he had got her in exchange for a two-year-old colt of his own, which had attracted the attention of Frank Smasher, the stock-rider in question. Frank, returning with him to Warbrok, roped the colt, the same day putting the breaking tackle on him, and within a week was cutting out cattle, on the Sandy Camp, with no apparent inferiority to the oldest stock-horse there.

Whether Allspice had been broken in after this Mexican fashion is not known, but as she could walk nearly as fast as Fergus, trot fourteen miles an hour, and canter 'round a cheese-plate,' if you elected to perform that feat, we must consider that she was otherwise trained in youth, or inherited the talent which dispenses with education. The light hand and light weight to which she was now subjected apparently suited her taste. After a few trials she was voted by the family and all friendly critics to be only inferior to the inimitable Fergus.

Mr. Churbett had volunteered to come over the evening before and accompany the young ladies, as otherwise Guy would have been their only cavalier, Wilfred being absorbed in the grave responsibility of the dogcart and its valuable freight.

This sporting vehicle contained Mrs. Effingham and Annabel, together with an amount of luggage, easily calculable when the possibility of a few picnics, a couple of balls, and any number of impromptu dances are mentioned. Mr. Effingham also, and his sons, found it necessary upon this occasion to look up portions of their English outfit, which they had long ceased to regard as suited for familiar wear.

The light harness work of the family had been hitherto performed by a single horse, a sensible half-bred animal, and a fair trotter withal. On this occasion Wilfred had persuaded himself that a second horse was indispensable. After divers secret councils among the young men, it ended in Mr. Churbett's Black Prince, the noted tandem leader of the district, being sent over. He was docile, as well as distinguished-looking, so all went well, in spite of Mrs. Effingham's doubts, fears, and occasional entreaties, and Annabel's plaintive cries when a nervous 'sideling' was passed, or a deeper creek than usual forded.

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'Oh, what a pretty place Rockley Lodge is—a nice, roomy bungalow; and how trim the garden looks!'

'Apparently inhabited,' said Annabel, 'and rather affected by visitors, I should say. I can see horses fastened to the garden fence, a carriage at the door, and a dogcart coming round from the back, as well as two side-saddle horses. So this is Mr. Rockley's place! He said it was just a little way from the town; and there—Mr. Churbett and Rosamond are turning in at the entrance gate.'

Duellist, having gone off in his training, thereafter not unwillingly retained for hackney purposes, evidently knew his way to the place, for he marched off at once, along the track which turned to the white gate. Followed by the tandem, with Beatrice and Guy bringing up the rear, the whole party drew up before the hall door.

Mr. Churbett, giving his horse to a hurried groom, who made his appearance from the offices, assisted Rosamond to dismount, by which time a youthful-looking personage, whom the Effinghams took to be Miss Christabel, but who turned out to be her mother, advanced with an air of unfeigned welcome, and greeted the visitors.

'Mr. Churbett, introduce me at once. I am afraid you are all very tired. Come in this moment, my dear girls, and rest yourselves; we must have no talking or excitement until dinner-time. Mr. Effingham, I count upon you; Mr. Rockley charged me to tell you that he had asked Mr. Sternworth to meet you. Mr. Churbett, of course you are to come, and bring the two young gentlemen. Perhaps we might have a little dance, who knows? You can go now. Mr. Rockley

had rooms and loose boxes kept for you at the Budgeree, or you wouldn't have had a hole to put your head in; what do you think of that?'

Mr. Churbett, much affected by his narrow escape of arriving in Yass and finding every room and stall appropriated, with no more chance of a lodging than there is in Doncaster on the Leger day, moved on, leading Fergus, and murmuring something about Rockley being a minor Providence, and Mrs. Rockley all their mothers and aunts rolled into one. He recovered his spirits, however, as was his wont, and caracolled ahead on Duellist, leading the way into a large stable-yard, around which were open stalls and loose boxes, apparently calculated for the accommodation of a cavalry regiment.

'This is the Budgeree Hotel, and a very fair caravanserai it is. Jim, look alive and take off the tandem leader. Joe, I want a box for Duellist. Bowcher, this is Captain Effingham of Warbrok, and these young gentlemen his sons; did Mr. Rockley order rooms for them and me?'

'Mr. Rockley, sir. Yes, sir. He come down last week on purpose to see if I'd kep' rooms for Mr. Argyll and Mr. Hamilton, as the place was that full, and like to be fuller; and then he asked if your rooms was took, and the Captin's and two young gents', and when I said they wasn't, he went on terrible, as it was just like you, and ordered 'em all right off, besides four stalls and a box.'

'Ah, well, it's all right, Bowcher. Mr. Rockley knows my ways. I wonder you hadn't sense enough to keep rooms for me and my friends, as I told you I was coming. Town very full?'

'Never see anythink like it, sir. Horses coming from all directions, and gents from Hadelaide, I should say. Leastways, from all the outside places. They're that full at the Star, as they have had to put half the horses in the yard, and rig up stalls timpry like.'

'Ha! that's all very well; but don't try that with Black Prince or these ladies' horses, or they'll kick one another sky high.'

While this conversation was proceeding, Mr. Effingham and his sons had been ushered upstairs, where, at the extreme end of a long corridor, the Captain was provided with a reasonable bedroom, enjoying a view of the town and sur-

rounding country. Wilfred and Guy had to content themselves with a smaller double-bedded apartment, the waiter apologising, as everything, to the attics, was crammed full, and visitors hourly, like crowds at the theatre, turned away from the doors. Slight inconveniences are not dwelt upon in the 'brave days when we were twenty-one.' So they cast their modest wardrobes on the beds, and tried to realise the situation.

This was a marked divergence from the circumstances of their mode of life for the past year. It appeared that every room on both sides of the corridor was tenanted by at least one person of an emotional and vociferous nature.

Boots were carried to the staircase and hurled violently down, accompanied by objurgations. Friendly, even confidential, conversations were carried on by inmates of contiguous apartments. Inquiries were made and answered as to who were going to dine at Rockley's or Bower's; and one gentleman, who had come in late, publicly tossed up as to which place he should go uninvited, deciding by that ancient test in favour of a certain Mr. Bower, apparently of expansive hospitality.

In addition to the dinner-chart, much information was afforded to such of the general public as had ears, as to the state and prospects of the horses interested in the coming events. Senator had a cough; and there were rumours about the favourite for the Leger. St. Maur and the Gambiers had come in, and brought a steeplechaser, which Alec was to ride, which would make Bob Clarke's Cid go down points in the betting. Mrs. Mortimer had arrived and those pretty girls from Bunnerong. The fair one would be the belle of the ball. 'No!' (in three places) was shouted out, 'Christabel Rockley was worth a dozen of her,' and so on. Mr. Effingham began to consider what his position would be if he should have to listen to a discussion upon the merits of his daughters. This complication happily did not arise, the tide of mirthful talk flowing into other congenial channels.

It must be confessed that if the company had been charged for the noise they made, the bill would have been considerable. But after all, the speakers were gentlemen, and their unfettered speech and joyous abandon only reminded Effingham of certain old barrack days, when the untrammelled

spirit of youth soared exultingly free, unheeding of the shadow of debt or the prison bars of poverty.

In due time the splashing, the dressing, and the jesting were nearly brought to an end. Leaving Fred Churbett to follow with Guy, Mr. Effingham and his heir departed to Rockley House.

'There *is* something exhilarating, after all, in dressing for dinner,' said he. 'After the day is done it is befitting to mingle with pleasant people and drink your wine in good society. It reminds one of old times. My blood is stirred, and my pulses move as they have not done since I left England. Change is *the* great physician, beyond all doubt.'

'I did not think that I should have cared half as much about these races,' said Wilfred. 'I had doubts about coming at all, and really I don't think I should have done so but for the girls and my mother. It is sure to do them good. But after all, Dick and Tom, not to speak of Andrew, are equal to more than the work they have to do at present, and I suppose one need not be always in sight of one's men.'

Rockley Lodge was profusely lighted. From the murmur of voices and rustle of dresses there appeared to be a large number of persons collected in the drawing-room, redolent of welcome as it ever was.

As they entered the house a voice was heard, saying, in tones not particularly modulated, 'Order in dinner; I won't wait another moment for any man in Australia.'

Effingham recognised his late visitor in the speaker, who, arrayed in correct evening costume, immediately greeted him with much deference, mingled with that degree of welcome usually accorded to a distinguished, long-absent relative.

'My dear Captain Effingham, I am proud to see you. So you've found your way to Yass at last. Hope to see you here often. St. Maur, let me make you known to Captain Effingham. I heard him mention having met your brother in India. Bob Clarke; where's Bob Clarke? Oh, here he is. You'll know one another better before the races are over. Christabel, come here; what are you going away for? Mr. Wilfred Effingham you know, Mr. Guy you never saw; capital partners you'll find them, I daresay. Is the dinner coming in, or is it not? [this with a sudden change of voice].

Mr. Churbett not come? Wait for Fred Churbett, the most unpunctual man in New South Wales! I'll see him——'

Fortunately for Mr. Rockley's ante-dinner eloquence the necessity for finishing this sentence was obviated by the appearance of the butler, who announced dinner, after which Mr. Rockley, saying, 'Captain Effingham, will you take in Mrs. Rockley? I see your friend Sternworth has just made his way in with Fred Churbett; it's well for them they weren't ten minutes later,' offered his arm to Mrs. Effingham, and led the way with much dignity.

The room was large, and the table, handsomely laid and decorated, looked as if it was in the habit of being furnished for a liberal guest list. There could not have been less than thirty people present, exclusive of the six members of Mr. Rockley's own family. Their friends Hamilton and Argyll were there, as also Mr. St. Maur, a tall, aristocratic-looking personage from the far north; Mr. Clarke, a pleasant-faced, frank youngster, whom everybody called Bob; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Malahyde, and other prepossessing-looking strangers, male and female; and lastly, their old friend Harley Sternworth.

What warmth, friendliness, cordiality, pervaded the entertainment! All apparently felt and talked like near relations, between whom had never arisen a question of property or precedence.

Mrs. Rockley, her daughter, and nieces were lively and unaffected, and beyond all comparison considerately hospitable. Rosamond and her sisters, dressed, for the first time since their arrival, in accordance with the laws of fashion as then promulgated, looked, to the eyes of their fond parents and brothers, as though endowed with fresh beauty and a distinction of air hitherto unmarked.

The dinner was in all respects a success—well served, well cooked; and as Mr. Rockley was severe as to his taste in wines, that department fully satisfied a fastidious critic, as was Howard Effingham. Messrs. Churbett, Argyll, and Hamilton, as habitués, had numberless jokes and pleasantries in common with the young ladies, which served to elicit laughter and general merriment; while Hampden, St. Maur, the parson, and Mr. Rockley in turn diverged into political argument, in which their host was exceptionally strong.

When they entered the drawing-room, to which Fred Churbett, Bob Clarke, and others of the *jeunesse dorée*, who cared little for port or politics, had retreated in pursuance of a hint from Mrs. Rockley, they were surprised to find that spacious apartment wholly denuded of its carpet and partially of its furniture. There was but little time to express the feeling, as a young lady seated at the piano struck up a waltz of the most intoxicating character, and before Mr. Rockley had time to get fairly into another argument with the parson, the room was glorified with the rush of fluttering garments, and the joyous inspiration of youthful sentiment.

Everybody seemed to like dancing, and no more congenial home for the graces Terpsichorean than Rockley Lodge could possibly be found. The host, who was not a dancing man, smoked tranquilly in the verandah, much as if the entertainment were in a manner got up for his benefit, and had to be gone through with, while he from time to time debated the question of State endowments with Sternworth, or that of non-resident grants from the Crown with John Hampden, who was characteristically inflexible but non-aggressive.

What with their neighbours Argyll and Hamilton, Ardmillan, Forbes, and Neil Barrington, the ever-faithful Fred Churbett, and divers newly-formed acquaintances who had arrived during the evening, the Miss Effinghams found so many partners that they scarcely sat down at all. Mr. St. Maur, too, perhaps the handsomest man of the party, singled out Beatrice and devoted himself to her for the greater part of the evening. During the lulls, music was suggested by Mrs. Rockley, who was ever at hand to prevent the slightest *contretemps* during the evening. Rosamond and Beatrice were invited to play, and finally Annabel and Beatrice to sing.

Beatrice was one of the most finished performers upon the pianoforte that one could fall across, outside professional circles; many of them even might have envied her light, free, instinctively true touch, her perfect time, her astonishing execution. Her voice was a well-trained contralto. When she sang a world-famed duet with Annabel, and the liquid notes—clear, fresh, delicately pure as those of the mounting skylark—rose in Annabel's wondrous soprano, every one was

taken by storm, and a perfect chorus of admiration assured the singers that no such performance had been heard in the neighbourhood since a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary.

It must not be supposed that Wilfred Effingham permitted much time to elapse before he took measures which resulted in an improvement of his recent acquaintance with Miss Christabel Rockley. He had seen many girls of high claim to beauty in many differing regions of the old world. He had walked down Sackville Street, and sauntered through the great Plaza of Madrid, bought gloves in Limerick, and lace in the Strada Reale; but it instantly occurred to him that in all his varied experiences he had never set eyes upon so wondrously lovely a creature as Christabel Rockley. Her complexion, not merely delicate, was wild-rose tinted upon ivory; her large, deep-fringed eyes, dark, melting, wondering as they opened slowly, with the half-conscious surprise of a startled child, reminded him of nothing so much as of the captured gazelle of the desert; her delicate, oval face, perfect as a cameo; her wondrous sylph-like figure, which swayed and glided in the dance like a forest nymph in classic Arcady; her rosebud mouth, pearly teeth, her childish pout smiling o'er gems—pearls, if not diamonds; how should these angel-growth perfections have ripened in this obscure outpost of Britain's possessions? He was startled as by a vision, amazed. He would have been hopelessly subjugated there and then had he not been at that time such a philosophical young person.

Lovely as was the girl, calculated as were her unstudied graces and matchless charms to enthral the senses and drag the very heart from out of any description of man less congenial than a snow-drift, Wilfred Effingham escaped for the present whole and unharmed.

At the same time he enjoyed thoroughly the gay tone and joyous feelings which characterised the whole society, and insensibly caught, in spite of his ever-present feeling of responsibility, the contagion of free and careless mirth.

Dance succeeded dance, the quick yet pleasantly graduated growth of friendly intimacy arose under the congenial conditions of gaiety unrestrained and mingled merriment, till, soon after midnight, the joyous groups broke up.

Mr. Rockley suddenly intimated that, as they would have a long day at the races next day, and the ladies would need all their rest after the journey some of them had made, to withstand the necessary fatigues, he thought it would be reasonable, yes, he *would* say he thought it would occur to any one who was not utterly demented and childishly incapable of forethought, that it was time to go to bed.

This deliverance decided the lingering revellers; adieus were made with much reference to 'au revoir,' one of those comprehensive phrases into which our Gallic friends contrive to collect several meanings and diverse sentiments.

At the Budgeree Hotel a desultory conversation was kept up for another hour between such choice spirits who stood in need of the ultimate refreshment of a glass of grog and a quiet pipe; but the wonders and experiences of the day had so taxed the energies of Mr. Effingham and his sons that the latter fell asleep before Fred Churbett had time to offer six to four on St. Andrew for the steeplechase, or Hamilton to qualify young Beanstalk's rapturous declaration that Christabel Rockley looked like a real thorough-bred angel, and that there wasn't a girl from here to Sydney fit to hold a candle to her.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BOB CLARKE SCHOOLS KING OF THE VALLEY

THE eventful day at length arrived. How many hundreds would have been disappointed if it had rained! From the sporting squatters, who looked out of window to see if the weather was favourable for Harlequin or Vivandière, to the farmer's son, busy at sunrise grooming his unaccustomed steed, and pulling the superfluous hair from that grass-fed charger's mane and tail, while his sister or cousin danced with joy, even before she donned the wide straw hat and alpaca skirt, with the favourably disposed bow of pink or blue ribbon, in which to be beautiful for the day.

And what more innocent pleasure? So very seldom comes it in the long months of inland farming life, that no moralist need grudge it to his fellow-creatures for whom fate has not provided the proverbial silver spoon. That brown-cheeked youngster believes that his bay Camerton colt, broken in by himself, will make a sensation on the course; perhaps pull off a ten-pound sweep in the Hurry-scurry Hack-race (post entry), and he looks forward with eager anticipation to the running for the Town Plate and the steeplechase. Besides, he has not been in town since he took in the last load of wheat. It is slow at home sometimes, though there is plenty of work to do; and he has not seen a new face or heard a new voice since he doesn't know when.

In sister Jane's heart, whose cheek owns a deeper glow this morning, what unaccustomed thoughts are contending for the mastery.

'Will it not be a grand meeting, with ever so many more people there than last year? And the gentlefolks and the

young ladies, she does like so to see how they dress and how they look. It is worth a dozen fashion books. Such fun, too, is a sweeping gallop round the course, and to feel the breeze blow back her hair. Everything looks splendid, and the lunch in the pavilion is grand, and every one so polite. Besides, there is Ben Anderson that she knows "just to speak to"; she saw him at a school feast last year, and he is certainly *very* nice looking; he said he would be sure to be at the Yass races. She wonders whether he *will* be there; nobody wants him, of course, if he likes to stay away—but still he *might* come; his father has a farm away to the westward.'

So the rhythm of human life, hope or fear, love or doubt, curiosity or sympathy, chimes on, the same and invariable in every land, in every age.

Thanks to the occasionally too fine climate of Australia, 'the morning rose, a lovely sight,' and if the sun flashed not 'down on armour bright,' he lit up a truly animated scene. Grooms, who long before day had fed and watered their precious charges, were now putting on the final polish, as if the fate of Europe depended upon the delicate limbs and satin-covered muscles. Owners, backers, jockeys, gentlemen riders, all these were collecting or volunteering information; while the ordinary business of the town—commercial, civil, or administrative — was suffered to drift, as being comparatively unimportant.

At an hour not far from nine o'clock the guests under the hospitable roof of the Budgeree Hotel were assembled at the breakfast-table. What a meal! What a feast for the gods was that noble refection! What joyous anticipation of pleasure was on all sides indulged in! What mirthful conversation, unchecked, unceasing! There had been, it would seem, a dinner and a small party at Horace Bower's, and, strange to say, every one had there enjoyed themselves much after the same fashion as at Rockley's. Bower had been in great form—was really the cleverest, the most amusing fellow in the world. Mrs. Bower was awfully handsome, and her sister, just arrived from Sydney, was a regular stunner, would cut down all before her. Mrs. Snowden had been there too —smartest woman in the district; seen society everywhere—and so on.

A race day owns no tremendous possibilities, yet is there

a savour of strife and doom mingled with the mimic warfare. Many a backer knows that serious issues hang upon the favourite's speed and stamina; on even less, on chance or accident. The steeplechase rider risks life and limb; it *may* be that 'darkness shall cover his eyes,' that from a crushing fall he may rise no more.

These entanglements weighed not in any wise upon the soul of Wilfred Effingham, as he arose with a keener sense of interest and pleasure in expectation than had for long greeted his morning visions. His responsibilities for the day were bounded by his vehicle and horses, so that his family should be safely conveyed to and from the course. Mrs. Effingham had at first thought of remaining quietly in the house, but was reassured by being told that the course was a roomy park, that the view of the performances was complete, that the carriages and the aristocracy generally would be provided with a place apart, where no annoyance was possible; that the country people were invariably well-behaved; and that if she did not go, her daughters would not enjoy themselves, and indeed thought of remaining away likewise. This last argument decided the unselfish matron, and in due time the horses were harnessed, the side-saddles put in requisition, and after a decent interval Black Prince was caracolling away in the lead of the dogcart, and Fergus exhibiting his paces among a gay troop of equestrians, which took the unused, but all the pleasanter, road to the race-course.

At this arena it was seen that the stewards had been worthy of the confidence reposed in them. A portion of the centre of the course had been set apart for the exclusive use of the carriages and their occupants. Not that there was any prohibition of humbler persons; but, with instinctive propriety, they had apparently agreed to mass themselves upon a slight eminence, which, behind the Grand Stand, a roomy weather-board edifice, afforded a full view of the proceedings.

In the centre enclosure were shady trees and a sward of untrampled grass, which answered admirably for an encampment of the various vehicles, with a view to ulterior lunching and general refreshment combinations at a later period of the day.

Here all could be seen that was necessary of the actual racing, while space was afforded for pleasant canters and drives between the events, round the inner circle of the course; and indeed in any direction which might suit the mirth-inspired members of the party. The view, too, Mrs. Effingham thought, as she sat in Mrs. Rockley's phaeton, in which a seat of honour had been provided for her, was well worth a little exertion. The park-like woodlands surrounded three sides of the little amphitheatre, with a distant dark blue range amid the dusk green forest tints; while on the south lay a great rolling prairie, where the eye roved unfettered as if across the main to the far unknown of the sky-line. Across this glorious waste the breeze, at times, blew freshly and keen; it required but little imagination on the part of the gazers to shadow forth the vast unbroken grandeur, the rippling foam, the distant fairy isles of the eternal sea.

Without more than the invariable delay, after twelve o'clock, at which hour it had of course been advertised in the *Yass Courier* of the period that the first race would punctually commence, and after sharp remonstrance from Mr. Rockley, who declared that if he had a horse in the race he would start him, claim the stakes, and enter an action against the stewards for the amount, a start *was* effected for the St. Leger. This important event brought six to the post, all well bred and well ridden. Wilfred thought them a curiously exact reproduction of the same class of horses in England.

His reflections on the subject were cut short by a roar from the assemblage as the leading horses came up the straight in a close and desperate finish. 'Red Deer—Bungarree—*no!* Red Deer!' were shouted, as Hamilton's chestnut and a handsome bay colt alternately seemed to have secured an undoubted lead. The final clamour resolved itself into the sound of 'Red Deer! *Red Deer!!*' as that gallant animal, answering to the last desperate effort of his rider, landed the race by 'a short head.' Hamilton's early rising and months of sedulous training had told. It was a triumph of condition.

Much congratulation and hand-shaking ensued upon this, and Wilfred commenced to feel the uprising of the partisan

spirit, which is never far absent from trials of strength or skill. He had more than once flushed at disparaging observations touching the studs in his immediate neighbourhood, at gratuitous assertions that the Benmohr horses were not to be spoken of in the same day as So-and-so's whatsyname of the west, or another proprietor's breed in the north, and so on. Now here was a complete answer to all such, as well as a justification of his own opinion. He had determined not to risk a pound in the way of betting, holding the practice inexpedient at the present time. But the thought did cross his brain that if he had taken the odds more than once pressed upon him, he might have paid his week's expenses as well as confuted the detractors of the Benmohr stud. This deduction, *ex post facto*, he regarded as one of the wiles of the enemy, and scorned accordingly.

He found the party more disposed to take a canter, after the enforced quietude of the last hour, than to remain stationary, so possessing himself of Guy's hack, whom he placed temporarily in charge of the dogcart, taking off the leader as a precautionary measure, he rode forth among the gay company for a stretching canter round the course, which occasionally freshened into a hand-gallop, as the roll of hoofs excited the well-conditioned horses.

The Town Plate—a locally important and much-discussed event—having been run, and won, after an exciting struggle, by Mr. O'Desmond's Bennilong, a fine old thoroughbred, who still retained the pace, staying power, and ability to carry weight, which had long made him the glory of the Badajos stud and the pride of the Yass district, preparations for lunch on an extensive scale took place.

The horses of the different vehicles, as well as the hackneys, were now in various ways secured, the more provident owners having brought halters for the purpose. Mrs. Rockley and Mrs. Bower, with other ladies, had arranged to join forces in the commissariat department, the result of which was a spread of such comprehensive dimensions that it required the efforts of the younger men for nearly half an hour to unpack and set forth the store of edibles and the array of liquors of every kind and sort.

> Rich and rare the viands were,
> Diversified the plate,

inasmuch as each family had sent forth such articles as, while available for immediate use, would cause less household mourning if reported wounded or missing. But the great requisities of an *al fresco* entertainment were fully secured. An ample cold collation, with such relays of the beloved Bass and such wines of every degree as might have served the need of a troop of dragoons. The last adjuncts had been forwarded by the male contingent, under a joint and several responsibility.

Eventually the grand attack was commenced by the impetuous Rockley, who, arming himself with a gleaming carver, plunged the weapon into the breast of a gigantic turkey, in the interests of Mrs. Effingham, who sat on his right hand.

After this *assaut d'armes* the fray commenced in good earnest. The ladies had been provided with seats from the vehicles, overcoats, rugs, and all manner of envelopes, which could be procured, down to a spare suit of horse-clothing. Shawls and cloaks were brought into requisition, but the genial season had left the sward in a highly available condition, and with a cool day, a pleasant breeze, the shade of a few noble eucalypti, fortunately spared, nothing was wanting to the arrangements. As the devoted efforts of the younger knights and squires provided each dame and damsel with the necessary aliment, as the champagne corks commenced to fusilade with the now sustained, now dropping fire of a brisk affair of outposts, the merry interchange of compliments, mirthful badinage, and it may be eloquent glances become no less rapid and continuous.

> Our Youth ! our Youth ! that spring of springs.
> It surely is one of the blessedest things
> By Nature ever invented !

sang Tom Hood, and who does not echo the joyous, half-regretful sentiment. How one revelled in the 'days that are no more,' at the casual concourse of youthful spirits, where the poetic sentiment was inevitably heightened by the mere proximity of beauty. Surely it is well, ere the bright sky of youth is clouded by Care or gloomed by the storm-signal of Fate, to revel in the sunshine, to slumber in the haunted shade. So may we gaze fondly on our chaplet of roses,

withered, alas! but fragrant yet, long ere the dread summons is heard which tells that life's summer is ended, and the verdant alleys despoiled.

Another race or two, of inferior interest, was looked for, and then the party would take the road for town, concluding the day's entertainment with a full-sized dance at the expansive abode of Mr. Rockley, which would combine all contingents.

The next day's more exciting programme included the steeplechase, to be run after lunch. In this truly memorable event some of the best cross-country horses in Australia were to meet, including those sensational cracks, The Cid and St. Andrew, each representing rival stables, rival colonies. The former with Bob Clarke up, the latter with Charles Hamilton; each the show horseman of his district, and backed by his party to the verge of indiscretion.

The less heroic melodramas having been acted out with more or less contentment to performers, there was a general return to boot and saddle, previous to the leisurely progress homeward from the day's festivities. This, as the hours were passing on towards the shadowy twilight, was not one of the least pleasant incidents of the day's adventures.

The road skirted the great plain which bounded the racecourse, and as the westering sun flamed gorgeous to his pyre, fancy insensibly glided from the realism of the present to the desert mysteries of the past.

'Oh, what a sunset!' said Christabel Rockley, whom fate and the impatience of her horse had placed under the control of Mr. Argyll. 'How grand it is! I never see sunset over the plains from our verandah without thinking of the desert and the Israelites, camels, and pillared palaces. Is it like that? How I *should* love to travel!'

'The desert is not so unlike that plain, or any plain in Australia,' explained Argyll (who had seen the Arab's camel kneel, and watched the endless line of the Great Caravan wind slowly over the wind-blown hollows), 'inasmuch as it is large and level; but the vast, awe-striking ruins, such as Luxor or Palmyra—records of a vanished race—these we can only dream of.'

'Oh, how wonderful, how entrancing it must be,' said Miss Christabel, 'to see such enchanted palaces! Fancy us

standing on a fallen column, in a city of the dead, with those dear picturesque Arabs. Oh, wouldn't it be heavenly! And you must be there to explain it all to me, you know!'

As the girl spoke, with heightened colour, and the eager, half-girlish tones, so full of melody in the days of early womanhood, as the great dark eyes emitted a wondrous gleam, raised pleadingly to her companion's face, even the fastidious Argyll held brief question whether life would not be endurable in the grand solitudes of the world, 'with one (such) fair spirit to be his minister.'

'My dear Miss Christabel,' he made answer, 'I should be charmed to be your guide on such an expedition. But if you will permit me to recommend you a delightful book, called——'

Here he was interrupted by the deeply-interested fair one, who, pointing with her whip to the advanced guard of the party, now halted and drawn to the side of the road, said hurriedly, 'Whatever *are* they going to do, Mr. Argyll? Oh, I see — Bob Clarke's going to jump King of the Valley over Dean's fence. It's ever so high, and the King is such a wretch to pull. I hope he won't get a fall.'

This seemingly abrupt transition from the land of romance to that of reality was not perhaps so wide a departure in the spirit as in the letter. The age of chivalry is *not* past; but the knights who wear khaki suits in place of armour, and bear the breech-loader in preference to the battle-axe, have to resort to means of proving their prowess before their ladies' eyes other than by splintering of lances and hacking at each other in the sword-play of the tournament.

The King of the Valley was a violent, speedy half-bred. His owner was anxious to know whether he was clever enough over rails, to have a chance for the coming steeplechase. An unusual turn of speed he undoubtedly possessed, and, if steadied, the superstition was that the King could jump anything. But the question was — so hot-blooded and reckless was he when he saw his fence — could he be controlled so as to come safely through a course of three miles and a half of post and rail fencing, new, stiff and uncompromising?

To the cool request, then, that he would give him a schooling jump over Dean's fence, which some men might have

thought unreasonable, Bob Clarke, with a smile of amusement, instantly acceded, and making over his hackney to a friend, mounted the impatient King, shortened his stirrups, and then and there proceeded to indulge him with the big fence.

Then had occurred the sudden halt and general attitude of expectation which Miss Rockley had noted, and with which she had so promptly sympathised. Bob Clarke was a slight, graceful youngster, with regular features, dark hair and eyes, and a mild expression, much at variance with the dare-devilry which was his leading characteristic. Passionately fond of field sports, he had ridden more steeplechases, perhaps, than any man in Australia of his age. He had been carried away 'for dead' more than once; had broken an arm, several ribs, and a collar-bone—this last more than once. These injuries had taken place after the horse had fallen, for of an involuntary departure from the saddle no one had ever accused him.

As he gathered up his reins and quietly took the resolute animal a short distance back from the fence, unbroken silence succeeded to the flow of mirthful talk. The fence looked higher than usual; the close-grained timber of the obstinate eucalyptus was uninviting. The heavy posts and solid rails, ragged-edged and sharply defined, promised no chance of yielding. As the pair had reached the moderate distance considered to be sufficient for the purpose, Bob turned and set the eager brute going at the big dangerous leap. With a wild plunge the headstrong animal made as though to race at the obstacle with his usual impetuosity. Now was seen the science of a finished rider; with lowered hand and closely fitting seat, making him for a time a part of the fierce animal he rode, Bob Clarke threw the weight of his body and the strength of his sinewy frame into such a pull as forced the powerful brute to moderate his pace. Such, however, was his temper when roused, that the King still came at his fence much too fast, 'reefing' with lowered head and struggling stride—an unfavourable state of matters for measuring his distance. As he came within the last few yards of the fence more than one lady spectator turned pale, while a masculine one, *sotto voce*, growled out, 'D—n the brute! he'll smash himself and Bob too.'

As the last half-dozen strides were reached, however, the

rusé hero of many a hard fought fray 'over the sticks,' suddenly slackening his grasp of the reins, struck the King sharply over the head with his whip, thus causing him to throw up his muzzle and take a view of his task. In the next moment the horse rose from *rather* a close approach, and with a magnificent effort just cleared the fence. A cheer from every man present showed the general relief.

'Oh, how beautifully he rides!' said the fair Christabel, whose cheek had perhaps lost a shade of its wild-rose tint. 'No one looks so well on horseback as Mr. Clarke. Don't you think he's very handsome?'

'Not a bad-looking young fellow at all, and certainly rides well,' said Argyll, without enthusiasm. 'I daresay he has done little else all his lifetime, like your friends the Arabs. Watch him as he comes back again.'

The margin by which he had escaped a fall had been estimated by the experienced Bob, who, taking advantage of a field heavy from early ploughing, gave King of the Valley a deserved breather before he brought him back.

By the time they were within a reasonable distance of the fence, the excited animal had discovered that he had a rider on his back. As he came on at a stretching gallop, he was seen to be perfectly in hand. Nearing the jump, it surprised no experienced spectator to see him shorten stride and, 'taking off' at the proper distance, sail over the stiff top rail, 'with (as his gratified owner said) a foot to spare, and Bob Clarke sitting on him, with his whip up, as easy as if he was in a blooming arm-chair.'

'There, Champion,' said the victor as he resumed his hackney. 'He can jump anything you like. But if you don't have a man up who can hold him, he'll come to grief some day.'

A few trials and experiments of a like nature were indulged in by the younger cavaliers before they reached town, most of which were satisfactory, with one exception, in which the horse by a sudden and wily baulk sent his rider over the fence, and calmly surveyed the obstacle himself.

Another dance, at which everybody who had been at the races, and who was *du monde*, finished worthily the day so auspiciously commenced. Wilfred Effingham, who had declared himself rather fatigued at the first entertainment,

and had at that festival asserted that it would do for a week, now commenced to enjoy himself *con amore*—to sun himself in the light of Christabel Rockley's eyes, and to *badiner* with Mrs. Snowden, as if life was henceforth to be compounded of equal quantities of race meetings by day and dances by night.

'I suppose you are a little tired, Miss Rockley,' he said, 'after the riding and the picnic and the races; it *is* rather fatiguing.'

'Tired!' echoed the Australian damsel in astonishment. 'Why should I be tired? What is the use of giving in before the week is half over? I shall have lots of time to rest and enjoy the pleasure of one's own society after you have all gone. It will be dull enough then for a month or two.'

'But are there any more festivities in progress?' he asked with some surprise.

'Any more? Why, of course, lots and quantities. You English people must be made of sugar or salt. Why, there's the race-ball to-morrow night, at which *everybody* will be present—the band all the way from Sydney. The race dinner the next night—only for you gentlemen, of course, *we* shall go to bed early. Then Mrs. Bower's picnic on Saturday, with a dance here till twelve o'clock—I must get the clock put back, I think. And Sunday——'

'Sunday! haven't you any entertainment provided for Sunday?'

'Well, no; not exactly. But everybody will go to church in the morning, and Mr. Sternworth will preach us one of his nice sensible sermons—they do me so much good—about not allowing innocent pleasures to take too great hold upon our hearts. In the afternoon we are all going for a long, long walk to the Fern-tree Dell. You'll come, won't you? It's such a lovely place. And on Monday——'

'Of course we shall begin all over again on Monday; keep on dancing, racing, and innocently flirting, like inland Flying Dutchmen, for ever and ever, as long as we hold together. Isn't that the intention?'

'Now you're beginning to laugh at me. It will be serious for some of us when you all go away. Don't you think so, now?' (Here the accompaniment was a look of such dis-

tracting pathos that Wilfred was ready to deliver an address on 'Racing considered as the chief end of man,' without further notice.) 'No; on Monday morning you are all to pay your bills at the Budgeree—those that have money enough, I mean; not that it matters—Bowker will wait for ever, they say. Then you go back to your stations, and work like good boys till the next excuse for coming into Yass, and that finishes up the week nicely, doesn't it?'

'So nicely that I believe there is a month of ordinary life compressed into it—certainly as far as enjoyment goes. I shall never forget it as long as I live—never forget some of the friends I have made here during the brightest, happiest time of my life, especially——'

'Look at that ridiculous Mr. Tarlton dancing the *pas seul!*' exclaimed Miss Christabel, not quite disposed to enter upon Wilfred's explanation of his sensations. 'Do you know, I think quadrilles are rather a mistake after all. I should like dances to be made up of nothing but valses and galops.'

'Life would be rather too rapid, I am afraid, if we carried that principle out. Don't you think Mrs. Snowden is looking uncommonly well to-night?'

'She always dresses so well that no one looks better.'

CHAPTER XII

STEEPLECHASE DAY

In despite of the mirthful converse continued around him, during the small hours, and the complicated condition of his emotions, Wilfred Effingham slept so soundly that the breakfast bell was needed to arouse him. He felt scarcely eager for the fray; but after a shower-bath and that creditable morning meal ever possible to youth, his feelings concerning the problems of life and the duties of the hour underwent a change for the better.

Charles Hamilton, Bob Clarke, and the turf contingent generally had been out at daylight, personally inspecting the steeds that were to bear them to victory and a modest raking in of the odds or otherwise. How much 'otherwise' is there upon the race-courses of the world! How often is the favourite amiss or 'nobbled,' the rider 'off his head,' the certainty a 'boil over'! Alas, that it should be so! That man should barter the sure rewards of industry for the feverish joys, the heart-shaking uncertainties, the death-like despair which the gambling element, whether in the sport or business of life, inevitably brings in its train!

'Why, this *is* life,' sneers the cynic; 'you are describing what ever has been, is, and shall be, the worship of the great god "Chance." The warrior and the statesman, the poet and the priest, the people especially, have from all time placed their lives and fortunes on a cast, differently named, it is true. And they will do so to the end.'

Such causticities scarcely apply to the modest provincial meeting which we chronicle, inasmuch as little money changed hands. What cash was wagered would have been treated

with scorn by the layers of the odds and inventors of 'doubles,' those turf triumphs or tragedies. Nevertheless, the legitimate excitement of the steeplechase, three and a half miles over a succession of three-railed fences, with the two 'hardest' men in the Southern District up, would be a sight to see.

Independently of the exciting nature of the race, an inter-colonial element was added. Bob Clarke and his steed were natives of Tasmania; the cool climate and insular position of which have been thought to be favourable to human and equine development. Much colour for the supposition was recognised by the eager gazers of Mr. Bob Clarke and his gallant bay, The Cid.

The former was evidently born for a career of social success. Chivalrous and energetic, with a bright smile, a pleasant manner, his popularity was easy of explanation.

In a ball room, where his modesty was in the inverse ratio to his iron-nerved performances across country, he was a rival not to be despised. Among men he was voted 'an out-and-out good fellow,' or a gentlemanlike, manly lad, from whatever side emanated the criticism.

The Cid was a grand horse, if not quite worthy of the exaggerated commendation which his admirers bestowed. A handsome, upstanding animal, bright bay, with black points, he had a commanding-looking forehand, 'that you could hardly see over,' as a Tasmanian turfite observed, besides a powerful quarter, with hips, the same critic was pleased to observe, 'as wide as a fire-place.' In his trials he was known to have taken leaps equal in height to anything ever crossed by a horse. But a stain in his blood occasionally showed out, in a habit of baulking. Of this peculiarity he gave no notice whatever, sometimes indulging it at the commencement, sometimes at the end of a race, to the anguish of well-wishers and the dismay of backers. A determined rider was therefore indispensable. As on this occasion the only man in the country-side 'who could ride him as he ought to be ridden,' according to popular belief, was up, who had also trained him for this particular race, little apprehension was felt as to the result.

Not less confident were the friends of St. Andrew, a different animal in appearance, but of great merit in the eyes of judges. Not so large as his celebrated antagonist, he had

the condensed symmetry of the racehorse. Boasting the blue blood of Peter Fin (imported) on his mother's side, his Camerton pedigree on the other, entitled him to be ticketed 'thorough-bred as Eclipse.' A compact and level horse, with the iron legs of the tribe, every muscle stood out, beautifully developed by a careful preparation. His dark chestnut satin coat, his quiet, determined air, the unvarying cleverness with which he performed in private, together with the acknowledged excellence of his rider, rendered the Benmohr division confident of victory.

The others which made up the race were fine animals, but were not entrusted to any great extent with the cash or the confidence of the public. Of these the most formidable was a scarred veteran named Bargo, who had gone through or over many a fence in many a steeplechase. His rider being, like himself, chiefly professional, they were both undoubted performers. But though the old chaser would refuse nothing, his pace had declined through age. It was understood that he was entered on the chance of the two cracks destroying each other, in which case Bargo would be a 'moral.'

The remaining ones, with the exception of King of the Valley, were chiefly indebted for their entry to the commendable gallantry of aspiring youth. It was something to turn out in 'the colours' and other requisites of costume before an admiring crowd; something, doubtless, to see a cherry cheek deepen or pale at the thought of the chances of the day; something to try a local favourite in good company. All honour to the manly and honest-hearted feeling!

Of these, briefly, it may be stated that Currency Lass was a handsome chestnut mare with three white legs, and much of the same colour distributed over her countenance. She was fast, and jumped brilliantly, if she could be prevailed upon not to take off too near to her fences, or ridiculously far off, or to pump all the breath out of her body by unnecessary pulling. The regulation of these tendencies provided a task of difficulty for the rider.

Wallaby and Cornstalk were two useful, hunter-looking bays, which would have brought a considerably higher price in the old land than they were ever likely to do here.

The course had been arranged so that the horses should start near the stand, and going across country take a circuitous course, but eventually finishing at the stand after negotiating a sensational last fence. This was not thought to be good management, but the enclosures admitted of no other arrangement.

The morning's racing having been got through, everybody adjourned to lunch, it being decided that *the* important event should take place at three o'clock, after which the excitement of the day might be considered to be over. In spite of the approaching contest, which doubtless contained an element of danger, as it was known that the riders of the two cracks would 'go at each other for their lives,' not less than the usual amount of mirth and merriment was observable. The two chief actors were altogether impervious to considerations involving life and limb, although they had seen and suffered what might have made some men cautious.

Bob Clarke had been more than once 'carried away for dead' from under a fallen horse, while Charles Hamilton had won a steeplechase after having employed the morning in tracking a friend who had gone out to 'school' a young horse, and whom the search-party discovered lying dead under a log fence.

The ladies exhibited a partisanship which they were at no pains to conceal. Bets (in gloves) ran high; while the danger of the imminent race rendered a fair cheek, here and there, less brilliant of hue, and dimmed the sparkle of bright eyes.

'Oh, I *hope* no one will get hurt,' said Christabel Rockley; 'these horrid fences are so high and stiff. Why can't they have all flat races? They're not so exciting, certainly, but then no one can get killed.'

'Accidents occur in these, you know,' said Mrs. Snowden, philosophically; 'and, after all, if the men like to run a little risk while *we* are looking on, I don't see why we should grudge them the pleasure.'

'It seems very unfeeling,' says the tender-hearted damsel. 'I shall feel quite guilty if any one is hurt to-day. Poor Mrs. Malahyde, Bob Clarke's sister, is dreadfully anxious; the tears keep coming into her eyes. She knows how reckless he can be when he's determined to win.'

'I fancy Mr. Hamilton's St. Andrew will win,' said Mrs. Snowden; 'he is better bred, they say, and he looks to me so well-trained. What do you think, Mr. Effingham?'

'I am a thick and thin supporter of the Benmohr stable,' said Wilfred. 'The Cid is a grand horse, but my sympathies are with St. Andrew.'

'I'll bet a dozen pairs of gloves The Cid wins,' said Miss Christabel impetuously, looking straight at Mrs. Snowden. 'He can beat anything in the district when he likes; Mr. Hamilton rides beautifully, but Bob can make *any* horse win.'

'My dear child, you are quite a "plunger,"' said Mrs. Snowden. 'Doubtless, they will cover themselves with glory. I'm afraid they can't both win.'

At this moment one of the heroes joined the speakers, sauntering up with a respectful expression of countenance, proper to him who makes a request of a fair lady.

'Miss Christabel, I have come to ask you to give me one of your ribbons for luck. I see Miss Effingham has decorated Hamilton. It's only fair that I should have a charm too.'

'Here it is, if you care for it, Bob!' said the girl, hastily detaching a 'cerise' knot from her dress, while her varying colour told how the slight incident touched an unseen chord beneath the surface; 'only I wish you were not going to ride at all. Somebody will be killed at these horrid steeplechases yet, I know.'

'Why, you're nearly as bad as my sister,' said the youthful knight reassuringly, and giving his fair monitress an unnecessary look of gratitude, as Wilfred thought. 'I shan't let her come on the course next time I ride. There's the saddling bell. We'll see whether the pink ribbon or the blue goes farthest.'

The arrangements had been made with foresight, so that beyond the customary galloping across the course for a surcingle at the last moment by a friend in the interests of Currency Lass, a proceeding which aroused Mr. Rockley's wrath, who publicly threatened her rider that he would bring the matter before the Turf Club, little delay was caused. At length all preliminaries were complete, and high-born St. Andrew passed the stand, shining like a star, with Charles Hamilton, in blue and gold, utterly *point devise*, on his back. Horse and rider seemed so harmonious, indeed, that

a ringing cheer burst from the crowd, and all the throats whose owners inhabited the hills and vales south of the Great Lake shouted themselves hoarse for St. Andrew and Mr. Hamilton.

'He's as fit as hands can make him,' said one of this division—a groom of O'Desmond's. 'There's few of us can put on the real French polish like Mr. Hamilton; he's a tiger to work, surely; and the little 'oss is fast. I know his time. If that Syd, or whatever they call him, licks im to-day, he'll have his work to do. My guinea's on St. Andrew.'

'He's a good 'un, and a stayer,' said the man who stood next to him in the closely-packed temporary stand; 'but there's a bit of chance work in a steeplechase. The Cid's a trimmer on the flat, or cross the sticks, but you can't depend on him. I wouldn't back him for a shillin' if young Clarke wasn't on him. But he's that game and strong in the saddle, and lucky, as my note would be on a mule if he was up. Here he comes!'

As he spoke, The Cid came by the post at speed, 'a pipe-opener' having been thought necessary by his master, and as the grand horse extended himself, showing the elastic freedom of his magnificent proportions, with the perfection of his rider's seat and figure, standing jockey-like in his saddle, moveless, and with hands down, it was a marvel of equestrian harmony.

The roar of applause with which the crowd greeted the exhibition showed a balance of popularity in favour of horse and rider as the long-repeated cheers swelled and re-commenced, not ending indeed until the pair came walking back, The Cid raising his lofty crest, and swinging his head from side to side, as he paced forward with the air of a conqueror.

'Oh, what lovely, lovely creatures!' said Annabel Effingham, who had never been to a race meeting before. 'I had no idea a horse could be so beautiful as St. Andrew or The Cid. Why can't they both win? I hope Mr. Hamilton will, I'm sure, because he's our neighbour; but I shall be grieved if The Cid loses. How becoming jockey costume is! And what a lovely jacket that is of Mr. Clarke's! If I were a man I should be passionately fond of racing.'

'Bob's a great deal too fond of it,' said Mrs. Malahyde, a bright-eyed matron of seven- or eight-and-twenty. 'I wish you girls would combine and make him promise to give it up. I can't keep away when he's going to ride, but it's all agony with me till I see him come in safe.'

'When you look at it in that way,' assented Annabel, 'it certainly doesn't seem right, and it's unfair of us to encourage it. What a pity so many nice things are wrong!'

'They're off!' said Miss Christabel, who had been eagerly watching the proceedings, during which the other performers had severally displayed themselves, receiving more or less qualified ovations, and then finally been taken in charge severely by Mr. Rockley as far as the distance post. 'They're off! Oh, don't say a word till they're over the first fence!'

All the horses of the little troop had sufficient self-control to go 'well within themselves' from the start except King of the Valley and Currency Lass. The mare's nervous system was so shaken by the thunder of the horse-hoofs and the shouting of the crowd at her introduction to society, that she pulled and tore, and 'took it out of herself,' as her rider, Billy Day, afterwards expressed himself, to that extent, that he felt compelled to let her have her head, with a lead over the first fence.

This barrier she at first charged at the rate of a liberal forty miles an hour, with her head up, her mouth open, and such an apparently reckless disregard of the known properties of iron-bark timber, that Billy's friends began to cast about for a handy vehicle, as likely to be in immediate demand for ambulance work. But whether from the contrarieties said to govern the female sex, or from some occult reason, Currency Lass no sooner had her own way than she displayed unexpected prudence. She slackened pace, and cocking her delicately-pointed ears, rewarded her rider's nerve and patience by making a magnificent though theatrical jump, and being awfully quick on her legs, was half-way to the next fence before another had crossed the first.

'Oh, what a lovely jump Currency Lass took!' said one of the young ladies, 'and what a distance she is in front of all the rest. Do you think she will win, Mr. Smith? How slowly all the others are going.'

'There's plenty of time,' said the critic of the sterner sex.

'She's a clever thing, but she can't stay the distance. Ha! very neatly done indeed. That's what I call workmanlike. Cornstalk baulks—well done—good jump! All over the first fence, and no one down.'

These latter remarks were called forth by seeing St. Andrew, The Cid, and Bargo charge the fence nearly in line, the latter rather in the rear, and go over with as little haste or effort as if it had been a row of hurdles. Wallaby hit the top rail hard, but recovered himself, and Cornstalk, after baulking once, was wheeled short, and popped over cleverly, without losing ground.

The same style of performance was repeated with so little variation for the next half-dozen leaps, that the eager public began to look with favour upon the enthusiastic Currency Lass, still sailing ahead with undiminished ardour, and flying her leaps like a deer. The sarcastic inquiry, 'Will they ever catch her?' commenced to be employed, and the provincial prejudice in favour of a true bushman and a country-trained horse, 'without any nonsense about her,' began to gather strength.

But at this stage of the proceedings it became apparent that the struggle between the two cracks could not longer be postponed. With one bound, as it appeared to the spectators, St. Andrew and The Cid were away at speed, their riders bearing themselves as if they had only that moment started for the race.

'They're at one another now,' said Argyll to O'Desmond. 'We shall see how the Camerton blood tells in a finish.'

'Don't you think Charlie's making the pace too good?' said Mr. Churbett. 'I wanted him to wait till he got near the hill, but he said he thought the pace would try The Cid's temper, and half a mistake would make him lose the race.'

'They're both going too fast now, in my opinion,' said Forbes. 'One of them will have a fall soon, and then the race is old Bargo's, as sure as my name's James.'

'Oh, what a pretty sight!' said Mrs. Snowden, as a large fence in full view of the whole assemblage was reached.

The native damsel was still leading, but the distance had visibly decreased which separated her from the popular heroes. All three horses were going best pace, and as the mare cleared the fence cleverly, but with little to spare,

pressed by The Cid and St. Andrew, as they took the jump apparently in the same stride, a great cheer burst from the crowd.

'Well done, Bargo!' shouted the complimentary crowd, in high good-humour, as the old horse came up, quietly working out his programme, and topping the fence with but little visible effort, followed his more brilliant leaders. The others were by this time considerably in the rear, but took their jumps creditably still. The next fence was known to be the most dangerous in the whole course. The ground was broken and stony, the incline unpleasantly steep, and a small but annoying grip caused by the winter rains interfered with the approach. In the hunting field it would have been simply a matter for careful riding. But here, at the speed to which the pace had been forced, it was dangerous.

'Why don't they pull off there?' muttered Mr. Rockley, virtuously indignant. 'No one but a madman would go over ground like that as if they were finishing a flat race. That fellow Hamilton is as obstinate as a mule. I know him; he wouldn't pull off an inch for all the judges of the Supreme Court.'

'I'm afraid Bob Clarke won't,' said John Hampden; 'that's the worst of steeplechasing, the fellows *will* ride so jealous. Well done, The Cid! By Jove! the mare's down! and—yes—no!—St. Andrew too. Don't be frightened, anybody,' as more than one plaintive cry arose from among the carriages on which the ladies stood thickly clustering. 'Both men up, and no harm done. Hamilton's away again, but it's The Cid's race.'

These hurried observations, made for the benefit of the visibly distressed *clientèle* of Hamilton, were called forth by the most sensational proceedings which had obtained yet.

As the two rivals came down the slope at the highly improper pace alluded to, they overtook Currency Lass at her fence, which confused that excitable animal. Getting her head from her rider, who had been prudently steadying her across this unpleasant section, with the idea that he would be unaccompanied till he was clear of it, she went at the fence with her usual impetuosity. A gutter threw her out a little; it may be that her wind had failed. It is certain that, taking off too closely to the stiff fence, she struck the top rail with

tremendous force, the impetus casting her rolling over on her back into the adjoining paddock, while her rider, fortunately for him, was 'sent rods and rods ahead of her' (as a comrade described it), and so saved from being crushed under the fallen horse. The mare rose to her legs trembling and half stunned, glared for one moment at surrounding objects, and then went off at full speed, with flapping stirrups and trailing reins. The Cid had sailed over the fence a yard to the left of her, and was going at his ease, with nothing near him.

Where, then, was St. Andrew? He had also come to grief.

Putting his foot on a rolling stone, he had been unable to clear his leap, though he made a gallant effort. Striking heavily, he went down on the farther side.

His rider, sitting well back, and never for one instant losing his proverbial coolness, was able to save him as much as, under the circumstances, a horse can be saved. Down on nose and knee only went the good horse, his rider falling close to his shoulder, and never relinquishing the reins. Both were on their feet in an instant, and before the crowd had well realised the fact, or the 'I told you so' division had breath to explain why St. Andrew *must* fall if the pace was kept really good, Charlie Hamilton was in the saddle and away, with his teeth set and a determination not to lose the race yet, if there was a chance left. Bargo came up with calculated pace and line, and performed his exercise with the same ease and precision as if he had been practising at a leaping bar. Cornstalk baulked again, and this time with sufficient determination to lose him half a mile. Wallaby gave his rider a nasty fall, breaking his collar-bone and preventing further efforts. While King of the Valley, going reasonably up to this stage, overpowered his rider at last, and hardly rising at his fence, rolled over, and did not rise. He had broken his neck, and his rider was unconscious for twelve hours afterwards. The race therefore lay between The Cid, St. Andrew, and the safe and collected Bargo, coming up *pedo claudo*, and with a not unreasonable chance, like Nemesis, of appearing with effect at the close of the proceedings.

The next marked division of the course was known as 'the hill,' an eminence of no great altitude between two farms, but possessing just sufficient abruptness to make the fence a more

than average effort. This 'rise,' as the country people called it, lay about three-quarters of a mile from home, and the horse that first came down the long slope which led towards the winning-post, divided from it but by several easy fences, had a strong chance of winning the race.

Before The Cid reached the base of this landmark, still keeping the pace good, but going comparatively at his ease, it was apparent that Hamilton, who had been riding St. Andrew for his life, and had indeed resolved to tax the courage and condition of the good horse to the last gasp, was closing in upon his leader. 'Sitting down' upon his horse, Charles Hamilton extorted praise from the assemblage by the determination with which he fought a losing race. He was well seconded by the son of Camerton, as, extending himself to the utmost, he flew fence after fence as if they were so many hurdles.

'What a pity poor St. Andrew came down at that abominable place!' said Annabel. 'I really believe he might have won the race. He was not so far behind Mr. Clarke when he disappeared behind the hill.'

'He's only playing with him, I'm afraid,' said Mr. Hampden kindly. 'Hamilton and his horse deserve to win, but that fall made too great a difference between horses so evenly matched.'

'The Cid's heart's not in the right place,' here broke in an admirer of Miss Christabel's, who had been cut down by the fascinating Bob. 'You know that, Hampden. I saw him refuse and lose his race, which he had easy in hand, at Casterton. He might baulk at that sidling jump behind the hill yet. It's a nasty place.'

'I believe he will too,' said Fred Churbett, staunch to the Benmohr colours. 'We ought to see them soon now; they're a long time coming. Take all the odds you can get, Miss Annabel.'

'Will *you* take seven to four, Churbett?' said Mr. Hampden. 'I know The Cid's peculiarities, but I'll back him out, and my countryman, Bob Clarke, as long as there is a Hereford at Wangarua.'

'Done!' said the friendly Fred; 'and "done" again, Mr. Hampden,' said Bob's rival.

Just as the words were finished a great shout of 'St.

Andrew wins, Benmohr for ever!' arose from the country people as *one horse* was seen coming down the long, green slope. On the rider could plainly be discovered the blue and golden colours of Charles Hamilton.

'Baulked, by Jove! the sidling fence was too much for him; thought Bob was sending him along too fast. Deuced uncertain brute; not the real thing; never could stay; nothing like the old Whisker and Camerton strain. Here comes Bargo! By Jove! Hurrah!'

Such comments and condemnations were freely expressed as St. Andrew came sailing along. The concluding cheer, however, was evoked by the apparition of a second horse which followed St. Andrew with a flogging rider, who was evidently making his effort. It immediately became apparent that this was Bargo, whom his rider was 'setting to with,' believing that the tremendous pace which St. Andrew had sustained for the last part of the race must now tell upon him. Where, then, was The Cid? Where, indeed? His admirers were dumb; his opponents jubilant. It is the way of the world.

'Where's your seven to four now, Mr. Hampden?' said the youthful partisan.

'Possibly quite safe; never be quite certain till the numbers are up. Here comes The Cid at last; Bob's not beaten yet.'

Another sustained shout from the excited crowd showed what a new element of interest this apparition of the lost horseman had added to the race. Bargo, carefully saved, and comparatively fresh, sorely pressed the gallant St. Andrew, whose bolt was nearly shot. Still, struggling gamely to keep his lead, and well held together, he had crossed the third fence from home before he was challenged by Bargo.

But down the hill, at an awful pace, ridden with the desperation of a madman, came The Cid. Bob Clarke, with cap off and reckless use of whip and spur, could not have increased the pace by one single stride had he been going for a man's life. Had a doomed criminal been standing on the scaffold, ready for the headsman's axe, did the reprieve of the old romances not be displayed in time, not another second could The Cid have achieved.

'He'll do it yet if they're not too close at the last fence,' said Hampden, with his usual calmness. 'I never knew The Cid baulk *twice* in one race, and he has a terrible turn of speed for a short finish. Bob's in earnest, I should say.'

That fact was doubted by none who saw him that day. His face was pale; his eyes blazed with a flame which few had ever seen who looked upon the handsome features and pleasant smile of Robert Clarke. The excitement became tremendous. The ladies made emotional remarks—some of pity for his disappointment, some of sympathy with his probable hurts, if he had had a fall. All joined in reprobating the unlucky Cid.

Christabel Rockley alone said no word, but her fixed eyes and pale cheek showed the absorbing interest which the dangerous contest, now deepening to a possible tragedy, had for her.

The furious pace appeared not to interfere with The Cid's wondrous jumping powers. At the speed he was driven at his fences he must have gone over or through them. He seemed to prefer the former, and cheer after cheer broke the unusual silence as high in air was seen the form of horse and rider, as every fence was crossed but the last, and perhaps the stiffest, a hundred yards from home.

St. Andrew and Bargo were now neck and neck, stride and stride. The indomitable chestnut had begun to roll; the stout but not brilliant Bargo was at his best. As they near the last fence it is evident that The Cid, still coming up with a 'wet sail,' is overhauling the pair. The question is, whether St. Andrew is not too near home.

The anxiety of the crowd is intense, the breathless suspense of the friends of the rival stables painful, the fielders are at the acme of excited hope and fear, when St. Andrew and Bargo, closely followed by The Cid, rise at this deciding leap. The chestnut just clears it, with nothing to spare; Bargo, overpaced, strikes heavily, and rolls in the field beyond; Bob Clarke charges the panel on the right like a demon, and, after a deadly neck-and-neck struggle with St. Andrew, who still has fight left, outrides him on the post.

The conclusion of this 'truly exciting race, covering with glory all concerned therein,' as the local journal phrased it, was felt to be almost too solemn a matter for the usual hack-

neyed congratulations. The overwrought emotions of the young ladies rendered a prompt adjournment necessary to side-saddles and vehicles, which, after refreshment supplied to the protagonists, were made ready for the homeward route. Bob Clarke received a congratulatory glance from Christabel Rockley, which no doubt helped to console him, as did such guerdon many a good knight of old, for the dust and dangers of the tourney.

His sister, Mrs. Malahyde, who could hardly have been said either to have seen or enjoyed the thrilling performance, for 'mamma was lying down crying in the bottom of the dog-cart all the time,' as her little daughter testified, now arranged her bonnet and countenance, and expressed her heartfelt thanks for Bob's safety.

Charles Hamilton received assurances from the ladies generally, and particularly from his neighbours of The Chase, that his courage and perseverance had been to them astonishing, and beyond all praise; while St. Andrew, beaten only by a head, after all his gallant endeavours to repair ill-luck, was lauded to the skies.

'Poor dear fellow!' said Annabel. 'I wonder if horses ever feel disappointed. He does droop a little, and it was wicked of you to spur him so, Mr. Hamilton. Now that naughty Cid goes swinging his head about as if he was quite proud of himself. How *he* has been spurred! Dear me!'

'Yes, and well flogged,' said one of the Hobart division. 'Bob said when he baulked behind the hill he could have killed him. However, it will do him good. He took his last fences as if he would never refuse again as long as he lived.'

'I will just say this, as my calm and deliberate opinion, and I should like to hear any man contradict me,' said Mr. Rockley, 'that there never was a race better ridden in the colony than Hamilton's on St. Andrew. If he hadn't made that mistake at the stony creek he *must* have had the race easily. His recovering his place was one of the best bits of riding I ever saw.'

'Oh, of course; but if The Cid hadn't baulked, *he* would have come in as he liked. Suppose we get them to run it over again to-morrow as a match for a hundred. I'll put a tenner on The Cid.'

'The race is run, Mr. Newman, and that's enough,' said Rockley decisively; 'quite enough danger for one year. The next thing is to get back to Yass in time to dine comfortably, and see that everything is ready for the race ball to-night.'

This sensible advice, which, like the suggestions of royal personages, savoured somewhat of a command, was duly acted upon, and in a short time the greater part of the company, who intended to recompense themselves for the fatiguing emotions of the day by the fascinations of the night, took the homeward road, leaving 'The Hack Stakes' and the 'Scurry' (post entry) to be run without them. There was ample time. The afternoon was mild and fair of aspect; a friendly breeze, sighing over the plain, had come wandering up from the south. The equestrian portion of the company formed themselves unconsciously into knots and pairs.

Bob Clarke, having shifted into mufti, was lounging homeward on a well-bred hackney on the offside of Christabel Rockley's Red King, whose arching neck he felt impelled to pat, while he replied to the eager questioning of the fair rider. Her cheeks were brilliant again with youth's bright tints, and her eyes glittered like imprisoned diamonds beneath her tiny lace veil.

'I hope you sympathise with me, Miss Effingham,' said Hamilton, as they rode in advance of the rest of the party, a position to which Fergus's extraordinary walking powers generally promoted him. 'Bob is receiving the victor's meed from Miss Christabel—how happy they both look!'

'I really do, sincerely,' said Rosamond, ignoring the episodical matter. 'It must be most provoking to have one's prize wrested away in the moment of victory. But every one saw what a gallant struggle you and St. Andrew made. Were you hurt at all when you fell?'

'I shall be pretty stiff to-morrow,' he answered carelessly; 'but I have had no time to think about it. I thought my arm was broken, as it was under St. Andrew's shoulder. It is all right, though numbed for a while. I am inwardly very sore and disgusted, I don't mind telling you. That tall fellow, Champion, and Malahyde, with all the Tasmanians, will crow so.'

'It can't be helped, I suppose,' said Rosamond soothingly.

'Mr. Hampden, at least, did not show any disposition to do so, for he praised your riding and St. Andrew's good finish warmly. He said all steeplechases were won either by luck, pluck, a good horse, or good riding, and that you had all but the first requisite.'

'Hampden is a good fellow and a gentleman,' said the worsted knight, rather consoled, 'and so is Bob Clarke. If one has done one's best, there is no more to be said. But I had set my heart on winning this particular race. Heigh-ho! our pleasure week is coming to an end.'

'Yes; to-night, the ball; to-morrow, the Ladies' Bag and a picnic. We are all off home on Monday. I shall not be sorry, though I have enjoyed myself thoroughly; every one has been so pleasant and friendly, and Mrs. Rockley kind beyond description. I never had so much gaiety in so short a time. But I shall be pleased to return to our quiet life once more.'

CHAPTER XIII

MISS VERA FANE OF BLACK MOUNTAIN

After a due amount of dining and dressing, the former performed by the male and the latter by the feminine portion of the gathered social elements, 'The great Terpsichorean event, which marked this most harmonious Turf reunion, was inaugurated with *éclat*,' as the editor of the *Yass Standard* (in happy ignorance of the illegal arrangement which divers magnates, chiefly being Justices of the Peace, were at that very hour transacting) described it in the following Monday's issue.

All the bachelors, and not a few of the married men, had quarters at the Budgeree Hotel, so that they had no unnecessary fatigue to undergo, but were enabled to present themselves in the grand ballroom of that imposing building nearly as soon as it was ascertained that the Rockley contingent, which apparently combined everybody's favourite partner, had arrived.

The brass band included a wandering minstrel from the metropolis, whose aid, both instrumentally and in the selection of dance music, proved truly valuable. The invitations, owing to the liberal views of Mr. Rockley, had been comprehensive, taking in all the townspeople who could by any chance have felt aggrieved at being left out.

The ball was opened by a quadrille, in which Mrs. Rockley and Hampden took part, while Rockley, with deferential demeanour, led out Mrs. Effingham, who consented on that occasion only to revive the recollections of her youth. Mrs. Snowden and Argyll, Hamilton and Rosamond Effingham, with other not less distinguished personages, 'assisted' at this opening celebration.

After this ceremonious commencement the first waltz took place, in which Wilfred found himself anticipated as to a dance with Christabel Rockley, who, with an utterly bewildering look, regretted that she was engaged to Bob Clarke. That heroic personage swiftly whirled away with the goddess in his arms, leaving Wilfred more annoyed than he liked to confess, and divided in his resolutions whether to stay at home and work austerely, avoiding the lighter amusements, or to buy the best horse in the Benmohr stud, train him at The Chase, and ride against Bob Clarke for his life at the next meeting. He had called up sufficient presence of mind to place his name again on Miss Christabel's very popular card, rather low down, it is true, but still available for a favourite waltz, in which Fred Churbett had promised to assist with his cornet, and Hamilton with his Sax-horn, a new instrument, believed to be the combination of all sweet and sonorous sounds possible to the trumpet tribe.

But all inappropriate thoughts were driven out by the next partner, a striking-looking girl, to whom he was introduced by Mr. Rockley, very properly doing duty as chief steward.

This young lady's name was stated to be Vera Fane, with great clearness of intonation. He further volunteered the information that she was the daughter of his old friend, Dr. Fane, and (in what was meant to be a whisper) 'as nice a girl as ever you met in your life.'

The young lady smiled and blushed, but without discomposure, at this evidence of the high value at which she was rated.

'Rather too good to be true, don't you think?' she said, with a frank yet modest air. 'I ought to declare myself much honoured, and all the rest of it. But you know Mr. Rockley's warm-hearted way of talking, and I really think he believes every word of it. He has known me from a child. But I apologise, and we'll say no more about it, please. Very good racing there seems to have been. I was *so* sorry, in despair I may say, to miss the steeplechase.'

'Then you only came in to-day?' asked Wilfred. 'How was that? I didn't think any lady in the district could have forgone the excitement. It seems to rank with the miracle plays of the Middle Ages.'

'Or rather the masques and tournaments of those of chivalry. But I was away from home, and had to ride a long way for the ball and the Ladies' Bag to-morrow.'

'I am afraid you must be tired. How far have you come to-day?'

'Really,' said the young lady, with some hesitation, 'I must plead guilty to having ridden fifty miles to-day. I am afraid it shows over-eagerness for pleasure, and dear old Mr. Sternworth might scold me, if he was not so indulgent to what he calls "the necessities of youth." But our home is a lonely spot, and I have so *very* little change.'

'Fifty miles!' said Wilfred, in astonishment. 'And do you really mean to say that you have ridden that immense distance, and are going to dance afterwards? It will kill you.'

'You must be thinking of young ladies in England, Mr. Effingham,' said the girl, with an amused look; 'not but what some of them rode fair distances for the same reasons a hundred years ago, papa says. I daresay I shall feel tired on Sunday; but, as I've ridden ever since I could walk, it is nothing so very wonderful. You mustn't think me quite an Amazon.'

'On the contrary,' said Wilfred, looking at the girl's graceful figure, and recognising that air of refinement which tells of gentle blood, 'I am lost in astonishment only. You look as if you had made a start from "The Big House" with the rest of Mrs. Rockley's flock. But we must join this waltz, if you don't mind, or your journey will have been in vain.'

Miss Fane smiled assent, and as they threaded the lively maze, practically demonstrated that she had by no means so overtired herself as to interfere with her dancing. Wilfred immediately established her among the half-dozen perfections he had discovered in that line. There was, moreover, a frank, unconcealed enjoyment of the whole affair, which pleased her partner. Her fresh, unpremeditated remarks, showing original thought, interested him; so much so, that when he led her to a seat beside her chaperon, having previously secured a second dance at a later period of the evening—and the *very last*—even Sir Roger de Coverley—the bitterness of soul with which he had seen Christabel

Rockley borne off by the all-conquering Bob Clarke, was considerably abated. He would have been incensed if any one had quoted '*surgit amari aliquid*,' nevertheless; if one may so render the cheerful bard, 'some charming person generally turns up, with power to interest.' It would not have been so far inapplicable to his, or indeed to the (comparatively) broken hearts of most of us.

By the time the dance of dances had arrived, when he was privileged to clasp the slight waist and gaze into the haunting eyes of the divine Christabel, he was conscious of a more philosophical state of mind than in the beginning of the evening. Nevertheless, the mystic glamour of beauty came over him, fresh and resistless, as the condescending charmer let her witching orbs fall kindly on his countenance, smiled merrily till her pearly teeth just parted the rosy lips, and blushed enchantingly when he accused her of permitting Bob Clarke to monopolise her. She defended herself, however, in such a pleading, melodious voice; said it was cruel in people to make remarks, altogether looking so like a lovely child, half penitent, half pouting, that he felt much minded to take her in his arms and assure her of his forgiveness, promising unbounded confidence in her prudence, and obedience to her commands for the time to come.

'There will be some more excitement, do you know, for the Ladies' Bag to-morrow,' said the enchantress. 'Mr. Churbett's Grey Surrey may not win it, after all. Bob told me that a horse of Mr. Greyford's, that nobody knows about, has a chance. He's suspected of having been in good company before. Won't it be fun if he wins, though I shall be sorry for Mr. Churbett. Only Mr. Greyford can't get a gentleman rider the proper weight. What is yours?'

'Really,' said Wilfred, 'I'm not sure to a few pounds. But why do you ask?'

'Don't you see? If you're not under eleven stone, you can ride him. We can't let any one in without an invitation received before the race. You had one, I know.'

'Oh yes, I believe so; but I never thought of riding.'

'Well, but you *can* ride, of course. Now, if you're the proper weight, you might ride Mendicant for Mr. Greyford; it would do him a service, and make the race better fun. Besides, all the girls would like to see you ride, I know.'

'Would *you* take any interest in my winning, Miss Rockley? Say the word, and I will do that or anything else in the wide world.'

'Oh, I daresay; just as if you cared what *I* thought. Now there's Vera Fane, that papa introduced you to, she would be charmed to see you win it. Oh, I know——'

'But yourself? Only say the word.'

'Then *do* ride—there, don't look at me like that, or you'll have mamma thinking I'm ill and knocked up with excitement; and if she begins to say I look pale, papa's capable of carrying me off before the ball's over.'

Wilfred, thus adjured, veiled the ardent fire of his glances, and then and there pledged himself to ride Mr. Greyford's Mendicant for the Ladies' Bag, and to win, if Miss Rockley would only back him, which she promised to do.

It was surprising how much more interest Wilfred took in the coming contest, now that he was about to guide one of the chariot racers, to disperse *pulverem Olympicum* in his own person. He danced perseveringly with all the partners suggested to him, covering himself with glory in the eyes of Mr. Rockley. He had another and yet another dance with Miss Fane, being much gratified at the interest she expressed concerning the coming race. He made the acquaintance, too, of Mr. Greyford.

'*Re* Mendicant, he's a lazy beggar,' said that gentleman frankly, 'but well-bred, and can come at the finish if he likes. I had given up the idea of starting him for want of a jock, but I shall be happy if you will ride him for me. We'll go halves in this wonderful bag if Mendicant pulls it off.'

And so the great race ball was relegated to the limbo of dead joys and pleasures, to that shadow-land where the goblets we have quaffed, the chaplets which wreathed our brows, the laughter that kindled our hearts, the hands that pressed, the hearts—ah me!—that throbbed, have mostly departed. There do they lie, fair, imperishable, awaiting but the blast of the enchanted horn to arise, to sparkle and glow, to thrill once more. Or has the cold earth closed remorselessly, *eternally*, over our joys and those who shared them, never again to know awakening till Time shall be no more?

Much must be conceded to the influence of the Australian

climate or to the embalming influences of active pleasure-seeking, which seems to possess an Egyptian potency for keeping its votaries *in statu quo* while engaged in the worship of the goddess. Whatever may have been the secret of unfailing youth, most of the race meeting constituents seemed to possess it, as they turned out after breakfast on Friday morning, apparently ready to commence another week's racing by day, and dancing by night, if the gods permitted.

About a dozen horses were qualified to start for the Ladies' Bag. Hamilton had one, Forbes had one, Bob Clarke (of course) another, so that the two stables would again be well represented. O'Desmond, who did not ride himself, had a likely young horse in, and there were several others with some sort of provincial reputation. There was the great Grey Surrey, and lastly that 'dark,' unassuming, dangerous Mendicant of Greyford's with Mr. Wilfred Effingham up.

That gentleman had never ridden a race before, but was a fair cross-country rider before he saw Australia, and since then the riding of different sorts of horses had, of course, tended to improve both seat and hands. He was aware of the principles of race-riding, and though Bob Clarke, Hamilton, Forbes, and Churbett had semi-professional skill, he yet trusted, with the befitting courage of youth, to hold his own in that tilt-yard.

He had borrowed a set of colours, and looking at himself in the glass arrayed as in the traditional races of England, was not dissatisfied with his appearance. He found himself wondering whether he should be regarded with indulgence by the critical eyes of Miss Christabel, or indeed the penetrating orbs of Miss Fane. Was there a chance of his winning? Would it not be a triumph if, in spite of the consummate horsemanship of Hamilton and Bob Clarke, the reputation of Grey Surrey, he should win the prize? The thought was intoxicating. He dared not indulge it. He partially enveloped himself in an overcoat, which concealed the glories of his black and scarlet racing-jacket, the only silken garment which the modern cavalier is permitted to wear (how differently they ruffled it in the days of the second Charles!), and hied him to the course.

Here he was met by congratulations on all sides.

'Glad to see you've taken to the amateur jock line, Effingham,' said Churbett. 'There's a world of fun in it, though it involves early rising. It's awfully against the grain with me, but I assure you I look forward to it every year now. It *compels* me to take exercise.'

'That view of racing never struck me before,' said Wilfred. 'But when we're at Yass, you know, one must follow the fashion.'

'Especially when certain people look interested. Aha! Effingham, you're an awfully prudent card; but we're all alike, I expect.'

'Pooh, pooh! why shouldn't I take a turn at the pigskin as well as you and the others?' said Wilfred, evading the impeachment; 'and this sort of thing is awfully catching, you know.'

'Very catching, indeed,' assented Mr. Churbett. 'Is that Miss Fane on the brown horse next to Mrs. Snowden? Ladylike-looking girl, isn't she? Suppose we go and get a bet out of her?'

Following up this novel idea they rode over to the little group, where Mr. Churbett was assailed with all sorts of compliments and inquiries about the state and prospects of Grey Surrey.

'I think the articles should have been selected with reference to your complexion, Mr. Churbett,' said Mrs. Snowden; 'you seem so certain of carrying it off. I know blue is your favourite colour, and I made my smoking-cap and slippers of the last fashionable shade on purpose.'

'Always considerate, Mrs. Snowden,' said the object of this compliment, as a smile became general at this allusion to Fred's auburn-tinted hair. 'You must have been thinking of Snowden, who resembles me in that way, and the *very* early days when you used to work slippers for him.'

'Really I forget whether I ever did much in that line for Snowden. It must have been centuries ago.'

'Oh, but I don't agree with that at all,' said the fair Christabel. 'Suppose some one with dark hair wins it, then he would have to go about with all sorts of unbecoming trash. Let every one be guided by their own taste.'

'I daresay a few trifles that will look well on Bob Clarke will be found in the bag,' said Hamilton. 'I heard some-

thing about a gorgeous crimson and gold smoking-cap. I wonder if anybody has been studying *my* complexion? If Effingham wins, you will all be thrown out.'

'Then you *are* going to ride, Mr. Effingham?' said the fair Christabel, with a smile so irresistible that it fully repaid him for his troubles and misgivings. 'I am sure I hope you will win, though I'm afraid, between Grey Surrey, No Mamma, and Bolivar, you haven't a good chance.'

'I wouldn't be too certain about that,' said Miss Fane, who had recognised Wilfred with a pleasant, cordial greeting, and whom he thought looking uncommonly well in her habit, and indisputably well mounted. 'Don't be alarmed by these great reputations. A little bird told me about Mendicant, and I'll take the odds (in gloves), which are eight to one, I believe, that he's first or second.'

This daring proposal brought rejoinders and wagers upon the head of the fair turfite, who quietly accepting a few of the latter, declared that her book was full, but was not to be dislodged from her position.

Wilfred felt much encouraged, and proportionately grateful to the fair friend who had stood by him and his unknown steed. So he registered a vow to remember her in the future —to like and respect and approve of her—in short, to pay her all those guarded tributes which men in early life keep for the benefit of women they admire, trust, and look up to, but alas! do not love.

Among his few well-wishers must be classed Wilfred's sisters and mother, who, honestly pleased to see him 'respeckit like the lave,' as Andrew would have said, secretly thought that he looked handsomer and better turned out when mounted than almost anybody else in the race—in fact, nearly as well as Bob Clarke. But even these partial critics could not assert to themselves, when they saw Master Bob come sailing past the stand upon Bolivar, a dark bay thoroughbred, looking like a brown satin angel (Bolivar, not Bob), as one enthusiastic damsel observed, that he equalled in appearance and get-up that inimitable workman. Still, he looked very nice, they lovingly thought, and of Wilfred's clear complexion, brown hair, well-knit frame, and animated countenance other fair spectators held a like opinion.

Grey Surrey came next, 'terrible' for a mile, and owing

to his Arab ancestry, a better stayer than might have been thought from his violent manners. His rider's admirably fitting nether garments, the wrinkles of his boots, the shading of his tops, were accurate to a degree. His bright blue colours had many a time been in the van. Kindly and affable in the widest sense, with a vein of irresistible comic humour, he was the most popular squatter in his district—a man of whom none thought evil—to whom none would dream of doing harm more than to the unweaned child. To a rare though not too sedulously cultivated intellect Fred Churbett joined the joyous disposition of a moderate viveur, the soul of a poet, and the heart of a woman. But the gold held not the due proportion of alloy—too often, alas! the case with the finer natures.

The comprehensive cheer which the whole assemblage instinctively gave showed their appreciation. From the crowd (not so many as on the previous day, but still were the people not wholly unrepresented) rose cries of 'Well done, Mr. Churbett! Hope you'll win again. Grey Surrey and The She-oaks for ever!'

And as the silky flowing mane glistened in the sun, while the proud favourite arched his neck and with wide nostril and flashing eye trod the turf with impatient footstep, as might his Arab ancestors have spurned the sands of Balk or Tadmor, every friend he had on the course, which comprehended all the ladies, all the gentlemen, all the respectable and most of the disrespectable persons, thought that if Fred Churbett and Grey Surrey did not win yet another victory, there must be something reprehensible about turf matters generally.

Probably, in order that the ladies might have a liberal allowance of sport in recompense for their contributions, and partly in compliance with the undeveloped turf science of the day, the fashion of 'heats' had always been the rule of this race. Thus, when Grey Surrey came in leading by a length, with Bolivar and No Mamma racing desperately for second place, every one of experience stated that the third, or even the fourth, would be the deciding heat if Bolivar or No Mamma was good enough to 'pull it off' from the brilliant Surrey. Wilfred had adopted the advice he had received from Mr. Greyford, and while keeping a fair place,

had taken care to save his sluggish steed. He nevertheless managed to come through the ruck without apparent effort during the last part of the running, and finished an unpretending fifth.

On delivering over his horse to Mr. Greyford's trainer, he was gratified to find that he had won that official's unqualified approval by his style of riding. 'There isn't a mark on him, sir,' he said; 'and that's the way to take him for the first couple of heats. Mendicant's a lazy 'oss, and an uncommon queer customer to wind up. But if Surrey don't win the next heat—and I think Mr. Forbes's No Mamma will give him all he can do to get his nose in front—it's this old duffer's race, as safe as if the rest was boiled.'

'But how about Bolivar?'

'Well, sir, Bolivar and No Mamma are a-cuttin' their own throats the way they're a-bustin' theirselves for second place, and if you go at whatever wins the third heat from *the* jump, and take it easy the next 'un, you'll have this 'ere bag to a moral.'

Returning from this diplomatic colloquy to the vortex of society, Wilfred found himself to be already an object of interest in sporting circles. Much advice was tendered to him, and counsels offered as to his future plan of action, but as these were mostly contradictory, he thought himself justified in holding his tongue and abiding by the professional opinion of the stable.

Before the final heat he found Fireball Bill walking the veteran up and down, with a serious and thoughtful countenance. 'Look 'ere, sir, don't you make too sure of this 'ere 'eat afore you've won it. The old 'oss seems right enough; he's bound to win if he stands up, but I don't like the way he puts down that near foreleg. It's allers been a big anxiety to me. He might go away as sound as a roach and crack up half-way round. But you make the pace from the jump, and keep 'em goin', or else one on 'em 'll do yer at the bloomin' post.'

'What chance is there of that?'

'Every chance, sir. You mind me. I'm a man as has follered racing since I was the height of a corn-bin, and I knows the ways on 'em. Mr. Clarke ain't easy beat, nor Mr. Hamilton neither. They'll go off steady, yer see, as if

there was no use tryin' to pass yer, along o' their havin' busted their 'orses in them 'eats as went afore.'

'And a very natural idea. It seems a pity to knock them about, after all they've done.'

'We've got *to win this race*, sir, and a race ain't won till the numbers is up. Now, Mr. Bob Clarke's dart is jest this. If he sees you don't keep the old 'orse on his top, he and Mr. Hamilton will wait on yer, savin' their own 'orses till they come to the straight. Then they'll go at you with a rush, and there's no hamatoor in Australia can take as much out of a horse in the last ten strides as Bob Clarke. *You're* caught afore the old 'orse can get on to his legs, and the race is snatched out of the fire by nothin' but ridin' and head-work, and we're—smothered!'

'Beaten and laughed at! I understand clearly, Bill. I shall always think you have had more to do with the winning of the race than I have.'

'That's all right, sir, but keep it dark. All this is confidential-like between the trainer and the gen'leman as rides. There goes the bell again. I can hear Mr. Rockley cussin' all the way from where he stands. Here's your 'orse, sir; you've got to win, or kill him!'

Delivering over the unsuspecting Mendicant with this sound professional but scarcely humane injunction, Fireball Bill gazed after his charge, and scrutinised the leg he suspected him of 'favouring.' 'He's right!' he finally exclaimed, after anxious deliberation; 'but if I hadn't primed the cove, 'e'd a' lost that race, sure's my name's William Scraper.'

Wilfred rode on his way in dignified fashion, as befitting the position of probable winner, but in his heart a feeling of thankfulness to the old trainer by whose advice he had escaped a catastrophe. What a mortification it would have been; how the vane of public opinion would have veered round! He trembled to think of it; and as he drew up after the others, he hardened his heart, resolved that no artifice of the turf should mar his triumph that day.

His rivals went off with an assumption of indifference, as if merely going round for form's sake; but he took the old horse by the head and sent him away as if he was riding against Time from end to end. His two chief antagonists

—for O'Desmond had very properly withdrawn his colt—waited at a reasonable rate of speed until it became apparent that Mendicant's rider had no intention of altering his pace. Then they set to, and by the way they came up, showed how accurate was Fireball Bill's calculation.

Suddenly, and without a sign of premeditation, Bob Clarke took his horse by the head, and with one of his many desperate efforts, sent him up so suddenly to the flank of Mendicant, that Wilfred thought the race was lost in good earnest.

But as he heard the approaching hoofs, he too commenced to 'do the impossible,' and found that, though nearly level, Bolivar was unable to improve his position, while Mendicant, answering whip and spur, gradually drew in advance, as the winning post and the judge's stand (and, as it seemed to Wilfred, half Yass at gaze) came to meet him. A few strides, a deafening shout, a rally of whips, and the race is over. But the long, lean head had never been overlapped; and as he pulls up, head down and distinctly 'proppy,' half-a-dozen men struggle for the honour of leading Mendicant into the weighing-yard, and his rider knows that he has won. Bolivar, with distended nostril and heaving flank, follows next, with Bob Clarke sitting languidly on his back, and looking nearly as exhausted as his horse; while No Mamma, eased at the distance, drags in, as if she had had enough of it for some time to come. Wilfred takes his saddle and mechanically goes to scale. 'Weight!' says Mr. Rockley decisively, and all is over.

In all turf contests, bitter disappointments, deep and lasting mortifications, sharpened by loss and inconvenience, occur. But when there comes a real triumph, the sweets of success are rich of flavour.

Wilfred was the hero of the occasion, Fortune's latest favourite, impossible to be deposed until next year. No newer victor could therefore take away the savour and memorial of his triumph, as, to a certain extent, he had now done from Bob Clarke.

Such is the inconsistency of human nature that, although the steeplechase required about ten times the amount of horsemanship, besides nerve, experience, and a host of qualities unneeded in a flat race, Wilfred found himself the

observed of all observers, and could not but discern that his rivals were temporarily in the shade.

He lost no time in bestowing himself into his ordinary raiment and joining the homeward-bound crowd, secure of the smiles which ladye fair never refuses to bestow upon the knight who has worthily done his devoir.

Christabel Rockley congratulated him warmly upon his good fortune, and then turned to console Bob Clarke, a process which apparently involved more time and explanation, so much so that Wilfred changed his locale, under pretence of looking after his mother and sisters, and soon found himself in more sympathetic company.

He saw that Miss Fane had become a great friend and associate of his sister Rosamond, so quickly are lifelong alliances cemented among young ladies. Mrs. Snowden was also in the neighbourhood, and among them he was flattered to his heart's content.

'I was sure you were going to win it from the first,' said Mrs. Snowden, as if stating an incontestable fact. 'I said to Mrs. Rockley, "How cool Mr. Effingham looks! Depend upon it, he has ridden in good company before."'

'I never bet anything more substantial than gloves,' said Miss Fane, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes; 'but I can quite understand the gambling spirit now. I longed to put a five-pound note papa gave me at parting on Mendicant. Dreadfully wicked, wasn't it? But I should have won fifty or sixty pounds, perhaps a hundred. I have made a small fortune, however, in gloves.'

'I shall always think that you were the cause of my winning, Miss Fane,' said Wilfred, looking most grateful. 'No one else believed in me, except these girls here,' looking at his sisters.

'We are prejudiced,' said Rosamond, 'and will remain so to the end of the chapter. But I thought you were fighting against odds, with such champions as Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Clarke. Now you have won the tilt and are the favoured knight. Is the queen of beauty to give you the victor's wreath?—and who is she?'

'Oh, Christabel the peerless, of course,' said Miss Fane. 'And I think her the prettiest creature in the world—that is, for a dark beauty, of course,' looking at Annabel, who

now came up. 'It's a case of honours divided, all the men say.'

'I wonder how we shall settle down in our peaceful homes again,' said Beatrice, 'after all these wild excitements and thrilling incidents. I feel as if we were leaving the first or second volume of a novel.'

'Why the first or second,' said Miss Fane, 'and not the third?'

'Because there's no possibility of our story being complete in one volume. There are materials for romances here, but the *dénouement* is wanting. Every one will go home again on Monday; the actors and actresses will throw on their wrappers, the lights will be put out, the theatre shut up, and no piece announced until next year. There is something theatrical about all pleasure. This indeed is real melodrama, with plenty of scene-shifting, comedy in proper proportion, leading actors, and a hint of tragedy in the last act.'

For the Effinghams this had been a completely new experience. Without complications of the affections, except in Wilfred's case, a wider estimate of Australian country life had been afforded to them. Besides the squirearchy of the land, they had met specimens of the best of the younger sons whom England's ancient houses still send, year by year, to carry her laws, her arts, her ambition, and her energy to the most distant of her possessions. These include, literally, the ends of the earth, where they may aid in the heroic work of colonisation, planting the germs of nations, and raising the foundations of empires. Such men they had among their immediate neighbours. Still it was pleasant to know that others of the same high nature and standard of culture, the Conquistadors of the South, were distributed over the entire continent.

Moreover, they had fallen across several perfect feminine treasures, as Annabel declared them to be—friends and acquaintances, most rare and valuable. Nothing could have exceeded the hospitality and thoughtful kindness of the ladies of the Rockley family. Mrs. Rockley had been unwearied in providing for the comfort of her guests, and in that congenial employment partaking as well in her own person of a reasonable share of the pleasures of the continuous

festa, underwent such fatigue, that nothing but an unruffled temper, with great natural advantages of constitution, prevented her from breaking down hopelessly before the week was over. As it was, though there was a slight look of weariness, an air of responsibility, in the morning, the least occasion sufficed to bring the ever-cordial smile to the kind face, when all gravity of mien instantly disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DUEL

In Ireland's good old days, before the decline of unlimited hospitality and claret, debt, duelling, and devilment generally, when the Court of Encumbered Estates was not, the whole duty of man apparently being transacted with an enviable scorn of ready-money payments, no doubt exists, that after such a race week as we have essayed to recall, more than one gentleman's hackney would have gone home without him, unless the pistol practice was worse than usual.

As it was, a contretemps *did* occur, which could not be settled without the intervention of seconds. These gentlemen decided that a meeting must take place. It chanced after this wise. As will happen in all lands, there had arisen a veiled but distinct antagonism between two men who aspired to social leadership. These were William Argyll and John Hampden.

The former, haughtily impatient of opposition, was prone to follow out likes and dislikes, with the enthusiasm of his Highland blood. Culture, travel, and the drill of society had but modified his natural temperament. Under provocation it was as untamed as that of any son of MacCallum Mohr who had never quitted the paternal glen. He undervalued the opinions of his Australian-born neighbours who had not, like himself, enjoyed the advantages of travel. Hasty in word or deed, habituated to high consideration from the dwellers near his paternal estate, he was careless to a fault about giving offence.

Hampden, though a proud and self-respecting man, was singularly imperturbable of demeanour. Open-minded,

generous, interested in every idea calculated to advance the welfare of his native land, his position was high and unquestioned. In his own part of the country he was respected by his equals and reverenced by his inferiors to a degree uncommon, but by no means unknown in Australia. The people were much in the habit of resorting to him for aid or counsel in their difficulties. And whatever Mr. Hampden said in such cases carried with it the weight and authority of law. His decisions, indeed, were more often quoted, more rarely disputed, than those of any bench of magistrates in the land.

Although cautious in forming his opinions and chary of expressing them, John Hampden was noted as one who never gave back an inch from any position which he assumed. This trait chafed the choleric Argyll, who had also a considerable 'following'—admirers of his attainments, and dominated by his unrelaxing though generous despotism. It therefore happened that, in public matters, Argyll and Hampden were mostly observed to take different sides.

Before the race meeting there arose a dispute, common enough in those days, between the stock-riders of the two establishments as to the ownership of certain calves at the annual muster of Mount Wangarua. Some ill-considered remarks of Argyll's, reflecting on Hampden's management, were repeated with additions. Allusion had been made to 'indiscriminate branding,' than which nothing could have been more uncalled for. A scrupulously exact man in such matters, many a poor man had reason to bless the day when his few head of strayed cattle found their way into the herds which bore the J.H. brand. Rarely was it placed on an animal without satisfactory proof of ownership. However, 'accidents will occur in the best regulated (cattle) families,' and so had come to pass the mistake, fully explained afterwards, upon which Argyll had commented unfavourably.

The opportunity afforded for withdrawing his hasty expressions was not availed of. So after a formal interview, the alternative was reached which, by the laws of society in that early day, compelled a resort to the pistol.

Of course, this ultimatum, though known to a few intimate friends, was carefully concealed from the general public. The rivals met without suspicious coldness, were

seen at the ordinary gatherings, and bore themselves as became the average pleasure-seekers of the hour. But the meeting had been fixed for the Monday following the race week, and it was agreed that the principals, with their seconds, should visit a certain secluded spot on the homeward route of Hampden's party, and there arrange their difficulty.

Both men were known to be good shots; with rifle and pistol (not yet had Colonel Colt impressed his revolving signet on the age) Hampden was known to have few equals. But no surprise was manifested when it was announced on the eventful Monday that Hampden and his friend Neville, together with Forbes, Argyll, and Churbett, had departed at daylight and taken the same road. Every one was in the confused state of mind which is prone to succeed a season of indulgence. There were bills to pay, clothes to pack, resolutions as to improvement to be made by those who had exceeded their usual limit in love, loo, or liquor. So that, except an expression of astonishment that any reason whatever should have had power to take Fred Churbett out of of his bed at such an abnormal hour, little was said.

As they rode through the silent streets of the sleepy town, a moaning breeze betokened that the exceptionally fine weather they had enjoyed was about to change for the worse.

To Fred Churbett, as he rode along with a young surgeon impressed in case of accident, the day seemed chilly, the fitful wind boding, the darkening sky gloomy and drear. 'What if one of these men, in all the pride of manhood, so lately rejoicing in the sport in which they had been jointly engaged, should never leave the Granite Glen alive? What a mockery was this life of ours! And for what? for a careless word—a hasty jest—for this might a man go down to the dark unknown, with all his sins upon his head. A melancholy ending to their pleasant days and joyous nights!'

These cheerless meditations were probably compounded in equal proportions of bilious indigestion and natural regret. Fred's inner man had come off indifferently under a regimen of late hours and mixed refreshments; so much so, that he had professed his intention, when he returned to the peaceful shades of The She-oaks, 'to lie on his back for a month

and live on blue-pill.' Such thoughts would not have occurred to him had he been engaged as principal. But as a mere spectator of a mortal combat they were impressively urgent.

Besides all this, Hampden was a married man—had a wife and half-a-dozen boys and girls at Mount Wangarua. When he thought that a messenger might ride up through the far-famed meadows, where the white-faced Herefords lay thick on the clover sward the summer through, to tell the expectant wife that the husband—the father, the pattern country gentleman—would return no more! Fred felt as if he must strike up everybody's sword, as in old melodramas, and call upon them in the name of God and man to desist from a deed at once puerile and immoral.

But like a dream when morning breaks, and princess and noble, castle and dragon flee into the shadow-land, whence they came, so his purpose vanished into thin air, as they suddenly debouched upon the Granite Glen, and he saw by the set faces of the men, as they dismounted, how unavailing would be all interference.

With sudden revulsion of feeling, he prepared to act his part. Motioning the young surgeon to follow him to the little creek which rippled plaintively over the grey blocks, shaded by the funereal, sighing casuarina, they took charge of the horses of the combatants. Forbes and Neville each produced one of the oblong cases 'which no gentleman could be without' in those days. Twelve paces were stepped by Forbes, in deference to his similar experiences. The principals took their ground.

Fred Churbett scanned narrowly, at the moment, the faces he knew so well. On Argyll's he saw the look of vehement resolve which he had seen a hundred times before, while his eyes glowed with angry light. Fred knew that whenever any one alluded to Hampden's alleged expression, 'that he was a hot-blooded Highlander, accustomed to rule semi-savages, and who did not know how to conduct himself among gentlemen,' or words to that effect, Argyll could not be held accountable for his actions. When the passion fit was over, a more accomplished, courteous gentleman did not live—generous to a fault, winning, nay, fascinating, of manner to all with whom he came into contact.

Hampden's face, on the other hand, bore its usual serious expression, with no shadow of change o'er the mild, contemplative gaze. He looked, as he always appeared to those who knew him, as if he were thinking out the subject on hand with painstaking earnestness in the interests of truth.

Duels were always rare in Australia. Now they are unknown. Society appears to manage without them in disputes affecting the honour of individuals. Whether manners have suffered in consequence, is a point upon which opinions have differed. It had so chanced that Hampden had never stood 'on the ground' before, although in skirmishes with the wild tribes of his native land it was well known that his cool intrepidity and unerring aim had more than once saved life.

On this occasion an observer of character might have believed that he was more closely occupied in analysing his own and his adversary's sensations than in attending to his personal interest.

That opinion would have been modified, when the critic observed him raise his hand with quiet precision at the signal. He fired with instinctive rapidity, and at the falling handkerchief two reports rang out.

As each man preserved his position unaltered, a sigh of relief broke from Fred Churbett. The features of Hampden had not in the slightest degree altered their expression. The eager observer even thought he detected a tendency to the slow, humorous smile which was wont to be his substitute for laughter, as Argyll threw down his weapon with a hasty exclamation, while a red line on his pistol arm showed that the accuracy of Hampden's aim had not been altered by the nature of his target.

'You are hit, Argyll?' said Churbett, starting forward. 'For God's sake, stop this mummery! I know Hampden regrets anything inconsiderate he may have said.'

The brow of Argyll was black with suppressed fury.

'A d—d graze, can't you see, sir?' he said, as he reluctantly pulled up his coat-sleeve for the inspection of the surgeon. 'The matter cannot stop here. An apology at this stage would be absurd. I am in Mr. Forbes's hands, I believe.'

That gentleman had already walked gravely forward to meet Mr. Neville, who, with equal seriousness of demeanour, conferred with his antagonistic diplomate. Words were exchanged, ending with an ominous shaking of the head on Forbes's part. The seconds, having courteously bowed, departed to their former positions. There they placed pistols in the hands of the opponents, and took their stations. Even at this stage the manner of the two men remained as essentially apart as their constitutions. Argyll stood chafing with impatience, while Hampden's eyes wandered calmly over the whole scene—the valley, the little stream, the threatening sky—as if considering the chances of the season.

As the pistols were handed to them, Argyll took his weapon with a quick gleam of the eye, which spoke of inward strife, while Hampden accepted his mechanically and proceeded to gaze fixedly at Argyll, as if prepared to give the matter his serious attention.

At the signal he raised his hand as before, but one report only startled the birds on the adjacent tree-tops. Hampden held his pistol in the steady hand which so few had ever known to swerve from a deadly aim, and then, elevating the muzzle, fired carelessly into space.

'We should have improved in our shooting,' he said, 'as we went on; Argyll's second shot was not so wide as the first. He has spoiled my coat collar.'

'By Jove!' ejaculated Neville, 'rather a near thing. This must end the matter; I'll be no party to another shot.'

'I have no objection to state *now*,' said Hampden, 'that I regret the expressions used by me. I beg unreservedly to withdraw them.'

After a short colloquy between Argyll and Forbes, the latter came forward, and with great precision of intonation thus delivered himself.

'I have much pleasure in stating, on the part of my principal, that while accepting Mr. Hampden's handsome apology and retractation, he desires to recognise cordially his generous behaviour.'

Only the Spartan laws of the duello, inexorably binding upon all men soever of a certain rank in society, prevented Fred Churbett from throwing his hat into the air at this termination of the affair.

As each party moved off in opposite directions, after Argyll had, rather against his will, submitted to having his arm bandaged, *secundum artem*, Hampden said to Neville:

'What mockeries these affairs are! I could have shot Argyll "as dead as a herring." It's better as it is, though.'

'It's a good thing his last shot wasn't an inch or two *inside* your collar instead of out,' said Neville gravely. 'After all, as you say, these things are mockeries, and worse. Suppose he *had* drilled you, and I was on my way to tell Mrs. Hampden that her husband would never return to her?'

'But *you* wouldn't be able to have given the sad intelligence, old fellow,' said Hampden; 'you would have been fleeing from justice, or surrendering yourself. Deuced troublesome affair to all concerned, except the departed. But a man must live or die, in accordance with the rules of society. After all, there's nearly as much chance of breaking one's neck mustering over that lava country of ours as being snuffed out in this way. Life's a queer lottery at best.'

'H—m, ha!' said Neville, 'great deal to be got out of the subject; don't feel in the humour for enlarging on it just now. What a good fellow that Churbett is! He had a mind to read the Riot Act himself.'

> An angry man ye may opine,
> Was he, the proud Count Palatine!

And dire would have been the wrath of our provincial potentate, William Rockley, had he but known on Sunday morning what deeds were about to be enacted within his social and magisterial jurisdiction.

No sympathy had he, a man of strictly modern ideas, with what he called the mediæval humbug of duelling. He looked upon the policeman as the proper exponent of such proceedings. Could he have but guessed where this discreditable anachronism, according to his principles, was being perpetrated, all concerned would have found themselves in the body of Yass gaol, in default of sufficient sureties to keep the peace. The news, however, did not leak out until afterwards, owing to the discretion of the persons concerned, and the fortunate absence of serious results. When it did become matter of public comment, his imperial majesty was furious. He abused every one concerned in unmeasured terms; swore

he would never speak to Argyll or Forbes again, and would have Hampden struck off the Commission of the Peace. As for Fred Churbett, he considered him the worst of the lot, because of his deceitful, diabolical amiability, which permitted him to assist in such infamous bloodthirsty designs unsuspectedly. Not one of them should ever darken his doors again. He would never subscribe another shilling to the Yass Races; indeed, he believed he would sell out, wind up his business, and leave that part of the colony altogether.

However, not receiving intimation of this infraction of the law until matters were somewhat stale, the *status in quo* was undisturbed. The whole of the company, with the exception of the few who were in the secret, were similarly innocent; so the air remained unclouded. An afternoon walk to Fern-tree Hollow, a shady defile which lay a couple of miles from the town, was the accepted Sunday stroll.

Every one turned up to say farewell, thinking it a more suitable time than on the hurried, packing, saddling, harnessing-up, bill-paying morrow. Then once more the work of the hard world would recommence. The idyll had been sung to the last stanza. The nymphs would seek their forest retreats, the listening fauns would disappear amid the leaves. The rites of that old world deity 'Leisure,' now sadly circumscribed, had been honoured and ended. This was the last day, almost the last hour, when Phyllis could be expected to listen to soft sighings, or Neæra to be seen in proximity to the favouring shade.

As they strolled homewards, in the evening, with a troubled sunset and a cooler breeze, as if in sympathy with the imminent farewell, the scraps of conversation which might have been gathered were characteristic. Something more than half-confidences were occasionally interchanged, and semi-sentimental speculations not wholly wanting.

At the close of the evening, and the end of the stroll, every one, of course, went to the Maison Rockley, and comforted their souls with supper, Sunday being an early dinner day, as in all well-regulated British families. Conversations which had not been satisfactorily concluded had here a chance of definite ending, as the guests somehow seemed unwilling to separate when the probability of meeting again was uncertain or remote.

With the exception of a little music, there was no attempt at other than conversational occupation, which indeed appeared to suffice fully for the majority of the guests. And though ordinary topics gradually introduced themselves, and Rockley, in the freedom of the verandah, reiterated his opinions to Mr. Effingham upon the iniquities of the land law, a subdued tone pervaded, half unconsciously, the various groups, as of members of one family about to separate for a hazardous expedition.

'I feel terribly demoralised,' said Mrs. Snowden, 'after all this dissipation; it is like a visit to Paris must have been to Madame Sevigné, after a summer in the provinces. Like her, we shall have to take to letter-writing when we go home to keep ourselves alive. The poultry are my great stand-by for virtuous occupation. They suffer, I admit, from these fascinating trips to Yass; for the last time I returned I found two hens sitting upon forty-five eggs. Now what philosophy could support that?'

'Whose philosophy, that of the hens?' inquired Hamilton, who, with his observant companion, had been mildly reviewing the confidentially occupied couples. 'It looks to me like a case of overweening feminine ambition on their part.'

'It was all the fault of that careless Charlotte Lodore who was staying with me—a cousin of mine, and a dreadful girl to read. She was so deeply interested in some new book that she left the poor fowls to their own devices, and never thought about adjusting their "clutches"—that's the expression—until I returned. If you could have seen our two faces as we gazed at the pile of addled eggs you would have been awed. I *was* so angry.'

As for Wilfred, he concluded an æsthetic conversation with Miss Fane by trusting that she would be enabled to accept his mother's invitation, and pay them a visit at Warbrok Chase before the winter set in.

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure, really,' said she, 'but I seldom manage to leave home, except to see a relation in Sydney, or when our good friends Mr. and Mrs. Rockley insist on my coming here. But for them, papa would hardly consent to my visiting in the country at all.'

There was evidently some constraint in the manner of the girl's explanation, and Wilfred did not press for the

solution, trusting to time and the frank candour with which every one discussed every other person's affairs in the neighbourhood.

Miss Fane took an opportunity of quitting her seat and joining Mrs. Effingham and Beatrice, with whom, much to Wilfred's satisfaction, she maintained a friendly and confidential talk until the little party commenced to disperse. He discovered at the same time that Christabel Rockley and Bob Clarke had exhausted their powers of mutual fascination for the present, so he could not forgo the temptation of hastening, after the manner of moths of all ages, to singe his wings in a farewell flutter round the fatal Christabel. That enchantress smiled upon him, and rekindled his regrets with a spare gleam or two from out her wondrous eyes, large as must have been the consumption of soul-felt glances during the evening; yet such is the insatiable desire for conquest that she listened responsively to his warm acknowledgments of the pleasure they had enjoyed during the week, nearly all of which was attributable to the great kindness of Mrs. Rockley and the hospitality of her father. 'He should *never* forget it. The remembrance would last him all his life,' and so on, and so on.

. . . . . .

On Monday morning business in its severest sense set in for the world of Yass, its belongings, and dependencies. Before dawn all professionals connected with race-horses were hard at work with the silent energy which characterises the breed. Jockeys and trainers, helpers and boys, were steadily employed, each in his own department, strapping, packing, or saddling up with a taciturn solemnity of mien, as if racing had been abolished by Act of Parliament, and no further rational enjoyment was to be hoped for in a ruined world. Correspondingly, the tide of labour and rural commerce swelled and deepened. Long teams of bullocks slowly traversed the main street, with the heavy, indestructible dray of the period, filled with loads of hay, wheat, maize, oats, or flour. Farmers jogged along in spring-carts, or on rough nags; the shops were open and busy, while the miscellaneous establishment of Rockley and Company, which accommodated with equal ease an order for a ton of sugar or a pound of nails, a hundred palings, or sawn timber for a

bridge, was, as usual, crowded with every sort of client and customer, in need of every kind of merchandise, advice, or accommodation.

Shortly after breakfast, therefore, Black Prince pranced proudly up before his wheeler to the door of Rockley House, looking—but by no means likely to carry out that impropriety—as if he was bent upon running away every mile of the homeward journey. Portmanteaus and, it must be admitted, parcels of unknown size and number (for when did women ever travel forth, much less return, without supplementary packages?) were at length conveniently bestowed.

Adieus and last words—the very last—were exchanged with their kind hostess and her angelic daughter, who had vowed and promised to visit The Chase at an early period. Rockley had betaken himself to his counting-house hours before. Fergus and Allspice were once more honoured with the weight of their respective mistresses, and the little cortège departed. Our cavalier had, we know, been prevented by a pressing engagement from accompanying them on the homeward route; but it was not to be supposed that two young ladies like Rosamond and Beatrice were to be permitted to ride through the forest glades escorted merely by relations. Most fortunately Mr. St. Maur happened to be visiting his friend O'Desmond, combining business and pleasure, for a few days. As his road lay past The Chase, he was, of course, only too happy to join their party.

Annabel Effingham thought that Bertram St. Maur was perhaps the prince and seigneur of their by no means undistinguished circle of acquaintances. A tall, handsome man, with a natural air of command, he was by Blanche and Selden, immediately after they had set eyes on him, declared to be the image of a Norman King in their History of England, and invested accordingly with grand and mysterious attributes. A well-known explorer, in the first days of his residence in Australia he had preferred the hazards of discovery to the slower gains of ordinary station life. He was therefore looked upon as the natural chief and leader in his own border district, a position which, with head and hand, he was well qualified to support.

The homeward journey was quickly performed, a natural impatience causing the whole party to linger as little as

possible on the road. Once more they reached the ascent above their home, from which they could look down upon the green slopes, the tranquil lake, the purple hills, of the well-known landscape. The afternoon had kept fine; the change from the busy town, the late scene of their dissipation, was not unpleasing.

'I am pleased to think that you young people have enjoyed yourselves,' said Mrs. Effingham, 'and so, I am sure, has papa. It has been a change for him; but, oh, if you knew how delighted I am to see home again!'

'So am I; so are we all,' said Annabel. 'I for one will never say a word against pleasure, for I have enjoyed myself tremendously. But "enough is as good as a feast." We have had a grand holiday, and like good children we shall go back cheerfully to our lessons—that is, to our housekeeping, and dear old Jeanie.'

'Your mother is right in thinking that I enjoyed myself,' said Mr. Effingham. 'I found most pleasant acquaintances, and had much interesting talk about affairs generally. It does a man good, when he is no longer young, to meet men of the same age and to exchange ideas. But I must say that the pleasure was of an intense and compressed description; it ought to last you young people for a year.'

'*Half a year*,' said Annabel, 'I really think it might. *We* met improving acquaintances too,—though I am popularly supposed not to care about sensible conversation,—Miss Fane, for instance. We shared a room, and I thought her a delightful, original, clever creature, and so good too. Can't we have her over here, mamma? She lives at a place called Black Mountain, ever so far away, and can hardly ever leave home, because she has little brothers to teach, and all the housekeeping to do. I am sorry she is so far off.'

'So am I, Annabel. We should all like to see more of her.'

'I think that there were an unusual number of pretty girls,' continued Annabel. 'As for Christabel Rockley, I could rave about her as much as if I were a man. She is a lovely creature, and as good-natured and unselfish as a child.'

'I must say,' said Mr. Effingham, 'that for hospitality in the largest sense of the word, I never saw anything to surpass that of our friends. I knew Ireland well when I was young,

but even that proverbially generous land seems to me to be outdone by our Australian friends.'

'I hope Jeanie will have a nice dinner for us,' said Annabel. 'But we need never be afraid of the dear old thing not doing everything she ought to have done. She knew we were coming home to-day, and she will be ready and prepared for a prince, if we had picked up a stray one at Yass. Home, sweet home! How glad I am! There is nothing like dissipation for making one feel truly virtuous.'

Of a truth, there is always something sacred and precious connected in the minds of the widely scattered families of the Anglo-Saxon race about the very name of 'home!' There was no one of the Effinghams whose heart was not stirred as they rode and drove up to the hall door, and saw the kindly, loving face of Jeanie, the seriously satisfied countenance of Andrew, and even the silent Duncan, quite excited for him, as he stood ready to assist with the horses. The garden in the neighbourhood of the entrance gate was trim and neat, while showers had preserved the far-stretching verdure which glorifies the country in whatever hemisphere. No great time was consumed in unsaddling. Guy personally superintended the stabling of St. Maur's horse, while Wilfred conducted him to one of the spare rooms. Dick Evans, always handy in emergencies, turned up in time to dispose of the tandem. And in less than half an hour Effingham and his new acquaintance were walking up and down the verandah awaiting the dinner-bell, much refreshed and comforted, and in a state of mind fitted for admiring the landscape.

'How fortunate you seem to have been in falling across such a family residence,' said St. Maur. 'You might have been for years in the country and never heard of anything half so good. What a lovely view of the lake; and first-class land, too, it seems to be.'

'We owe our good fortune in great part, or I may say altogether, to my old friend Sternworth. But for him we should never have seen Australia, or have been stumbling about in the dark after we did come here. And if it were possible to need any other aid or advice, I feel certain Mr. Rockley would insist on giving it. I must say that the soil of Australia produces more friends in need to the square mile than any other I know.'

'It may be overrated in that respect,' said St. Maur, smiling; 'but you are in no danger of overrating Rockley's benevolence or his miraculous ways and means of carrying out his intentions. As for Mr. Sternworth, he is the "Man of Ross"—or rather of Yass—

To all the country dear,

and passing rich on not exactly "forty pounds a year," but the Australian equivalent. If he introduces any more such desirable colonists we must have him made rural Dean. You are satisfied with your investment, I take it?'

'So much so, that I look forward with the keenest relish to the many changes and improvements [here his visitor gave a slight involuntary motion of dissent] which I trust to carry out during the next few years. Everything is reassuring in a money-making aspect, so I trust not to be indiscreet in developing the property.'

'My dear sir, nothing can be more proper than that we should carry out plans for the improvement of our estates, after they have shown annual profit balances for years. But to spend money on improvements in Australia *before* you have a reserve fund is—pardon my frankness—held to be imprudent.'

'But surely a property well improved must pay eventually better than one where, as at present, all the stock are permitted to roam almost in a state of nature?'

'When you come to talk of stock paying, my dear sir, you must bear in mind that it is not the finest animal that yields the most profit, but the one on which, at a saleable age, you have *expended the least money*.'

The evening passed most pleasantly, with just sufficient reference to the experiences of the week to render the conversation entertaining. In the morning their guest departed, and with him the last associations of the memorable race meeting, leaving the family free to pursue the calm pursuits of their ordinary life.

Wilfred found himself freshly invigorated and eager to take up again occupations connected with the policy of the establishment. He praised Dick Evans and old Tom warmly for the exact order in which he found all departments, not forgetting a word of approval for Andrew, of whose good

conduct, however, he was assured under all possible circumstances.

As the season passed on, it seemed as though the family of the Effinghams had migrated to one of the poets' isles—

> Happy with orchard lawns,
> Where never wind doth blow or tempest rave—

so flawless were all the climatic conditions, upon which their well-being depended.

Pleasant it was, after the day's work was done, when the family gathered round the substantial fire which, red-glowing with piled-up logs, thoroughly warmed but did not oppressively heat the lofty room. Then came truly the season of

> Rest, and affection, and stillness.

Although a certain reaction was apparent after the stupendous adventures and experiences of the race meeting, yet moderate social intercourse survived. Mr. Churbett was the first of the personages from the outer world who presented himself, and the historiette of the duel having leaked out, he had to undergo a grave lecture and remonstrance from Mrs. Effingham, which, as he said afterwards, reminded him so of his own mother that it brought the tears into his eyes.

Mr. Argyll, luckily for his peace of mind, had occasion to go to Sydney, otherwise, not to mention chance reviewers and critics, it is hard to imagine how he could have protected himself against the uncompromising testimony which Mrs. Teviot felt herself compelled to take up against him.

'Spillin' the bluid o' the Lord's anointed; no that Maister Hampden was mair than a magistrate, but still it is written, "they bear not the sword in vain." And oh, it's wae to think if Hampden's bullet had juist gane thro' the heart o' Maister Argyll, and his mither, that gracious lady, wearyin' for him by the bonny hills o' Tarbert! And that Maister Churbett, I wadna hae thocht it. I could fell him.'

Howard Effingham, in a general way, disapproved of duelling, but as a soldier and a man of the world was free to confess that, as society was constituted, such an ultimatum could not be dispensed with. He was happy to hear no casualty had occurred. His own opinion, judging from what he had seen of colonial society, was that the men composing

it were an exceptionally reasonable set of people, whose lives, from circumstances, were of exceptional value to the community at large as well as to their families. In the older countries of Europe, where duelling had formerly flourished, the direct converse of this proposition often obtained. He believed that in course of time the practice of duelling would become so unnecessary, even unfashionable, as to be practically obsolete.

Mr. Hampden did not belong to their 'side of the country' (or neighbourhood); thus he was necessarily left to receive his share of admonition from his wife, and such of his personal friends who cared to volunteer reproof or remonstrance. There were those who smiled sardonically at this view of the case.

CHAPTER XV

THE LIFE STORY OF TOM GLENDINNING

DURING one of the long rides which Wilfred was obliged to take from time to time with Tom Glendinning, it occurred to him to ask about his previous history. The old man was unusually well; that is, free from rheumatism and neuralgia. The demons which tortured his irritable temper were at rest. For a wonder, Tom was communicative.

'Sure there's little use in knowin' the finds and the kills and blank days of a toothless old hound like meself. I'm broken-mouthed enough to know better; but the oulder some gets, the wickeder they are. Maybe it's because there's little hope for them. I was born in the north of Ireland, where my people was dacent enough. Linen factories they had—no less. My great grandfather came from Scotland, my father was dead, and my uncle that I lived with was the sourest old miser that ever the Black North turned out. I was a wild slip of a youngster always, like a hawk among barn-door fowl. My mother came from the West. It was her blood I had, and it ran too free and merry in thim days. She was dead too, but I loved her people. I liked the sporting notions of 'em, and took to their ways, their fights, their fairs and the very brogue, just to spite my uncle and his canting breed.

'I hated everything they liked, and liked everything they hated. I was flogged and locked up for runnin' away from school. Why should I stay in and larn out of a dog's-eared book when the hounds met within five Irish miles of me? I was always with them when I could slip off—sleepin' in the stables, helpin' the grooms, doin' anything so they'd let

me stay about the stables and kennel. I could ride any hunter they had at exercise and knew every fox-covert in the neighbourhood, every hare's form, besides being able to tie a fly and snare rabbits. When I was twelve years old I ran away and made my way down to Mayo, to my mother's people—God be with them all their days! I was happy then.'

'I suppose you were, indeed,' said Wilfred.

'Why wouldn't I be? My mother's brother was but a small farmer, but he was a king's ayqual for kind-heartedness, divilment and manliness. He could follow the hounds on foot for a ten-mile run. He was the best laper, wrestler, hurler, and stick-fighter in the barony. The sort of man I could have died for. More by token, he took to me at once when I stumbled in sore-footed and stiff like a stray puppy. I was the "white-headed boy" for my dead mother's sake.'

'You had all you could wish for, then.'

'I had. I was a fool, too, but sure I didn't know it. 'Tis that same makes all the differ. The Squire took a fancy to me, after I rode a five-year-old for him over the ox-fences one day. I was made dog-boy, afterwards third whip; and sure, when I had on the cord breeches and the coat with the hunt button, I was prouder than the king. There was no divilment in all the land I wasn't in; but I didn't drink in thim days, and I knew my work well. Whin I was twenty-two a fit took me to go to Belfast and see the ould place again.'

'Did you wish to ask for your uncle's blessing?'

'Not if I was stritched for it! But my cousin Mary! sure I could never get her out of my head, and thim black eyes of hers. She kissed me the night I ran away, and the taste of her lips and the sweet look of her eyes could never lave me. I can see her face now. I wonder where is she? And will I see her again when I go to my place!'

The old man turned away his head; his voice was still for some moments. Were there tears in those evil-glowing eyes, that never lowered before mortal man or quailed under the shadow of death? Who shall say? Wilfred played with his bridle-rein. When the henchman spoke next he gazed resolutely before him, towards the far purple mountain peak; his voice once more was strong and clear.

'Whin I seen her again she was a woman grown, but her eyes were the same, and her heart was true to the wild boy that was born to ruin all that was nigh or kind to him. The old man scowled at me. There was little love between us.

'"So you've grown into a useless man instead of a disobedient lad," he said. "Why didn't ye stay among the rebels and white-boys of the West? It's the company that fits ye well; you'll have the better chance of being hanged before you're older. Change your name before it's a by-word and a disgrace to honest folks."

'I swore then I'd make him repent his words, and that if I was hanged my name should be known far and wide. I went back to the wild West. But if I did I gave him good raison to curse me to his dyin' day. I soothered over Mary to marry me, and the day after we were well on the way to Athlone.'

'Surely then you had a happy life before you, Tom?'

'True for you. If I wasn't happy, no man ever was. But the divil was too strong in me. I was right for the first year. I loved my work with the hounds, and the master—rest his sowl—used to say there wasn't a whip west of Athlone could hold a candle to me. He gave me a snug cottage. Mary was a great favourite entirely with the ladies of the house. For that year—that one blessed year of my life—I was free from bad ways. Within the year Mary had a fine boy in her arms—the moral of his father, every one said—and as she smiled on me, I felt as if what the priest said about being good and all the rest of it, might be true, after all.'

'And what made the change, Tom?'

'The ould story—restlessness, bad company, and saycret societies. I got mixed up in one, that I joined before I was married, more for the fun of the night walks and drillin's and rides than anything else. The oath once taken—a terrible oath it was, more by token—I thought shame of breakin' it. It's little I'd care *now* for a dozen like it. The end of it was, one night I must go off with a mob of young fools, like myself, to frighten a strong farmer who had taken the land over a poor man's head. I didn't know then that the best kindness for a strugglin' holder there, was to hunt him out of the overstocked land to this place, or America, or the

West Indies. Anyhow, we burned a stack. After I left, the boys were foolish and bate him. He took to his bed and died—divil mend him! Two days afterwards I was arrested on a warrant, and lodged in the county gaol. 'Twas the first time I heard a prison lock turn behind me. Not the last, by many a score times.

'I had no chance at the Assizes. A girl swore to me as Huntsman Tom. Five of thim was hanged. I got off with transportation. I was four miles away whin they were heard batin' Doran. I asked the Judge to hang me with the rest. He said it couldn't be done. Mary came every day to see me, poor girleen; she liked to show me the boy; but I could see her heart was broke, though she tried to smile—such a smile—for my sake. I desarved what I got, maybe. But if I'd been let off then, as there's a God in heaven I'd have starved rather than have done a wrong turn agin as long as I lived. If them judges knew a man's heart, would they let one off, wonst in a way? Mary was with me every day, wet or dry, on board the prison ship till she sailed. Is there angels come to hell, I wonder, to see the wretches in torment? If they do, they'll look like *her*, as she stood on the deck and trembled whin the chained divils that some calls men filed by. She looked at me with her soft eyes, till I grew mad, and told her roughly to go home and take the child with her. Then she dropped on her knees and cried, and kissed my hands with the irons on them and the face of me, like a madwoman. She lifted the baby to me for a minute, and it held out its hands. I kissed its wheeshy soft face, and she was gone out of my sight—out of my life—for ever.'

'How did you like the colony?'

'Well enough at the first. I worked well, and did what I was tould. It was all the relafe there was. I made sure I should get my freedom in a few years. The first letther I got was from my old uncle. Mary was dead! He said nothin' about the child, but he would bring it up, and never wished to hear my name again. This changed me into a rale divil, no less. All that was bad in me kem out. I was that desperate that I defied the overseers, made friends with the biggest villians among the prisoners, and did everything foolish that came into my head. I was punished, and the worse I was trated the worse I grew. I was chained

and flogged and starved and put into dark cells. 'Tis little satisfaction they got of me, for I grew that savage and stubborn that I was all as one as a wild baste, only wickeder. If ye seen my back now, after the triangles, scarred and callused from shoulder to flank! I was marked out for Norfolk Island; ye've heard tell of that place?'

Wilfred nodded assent.

'That *hell!*' screamed the old man, 'where men once sent never came back. Flogged and chained; herded like bastes, when the lime that they carried off to the boats burned holes in their naked flesh, wading through the surf with it! But I forgot, there was *one* way to get back to Sydney.'

'And what way was that?'

'You could always *kill* a man—one of your mates—only a prisoner—sure, it couldn't matter much!' said the old man with a dreadful laugh; 'but ye were sent up to Sydney in the Government brig, and tried and hanged as reg'lar as if ye wor a free man and owned a free life. There was thim there thin that thought the pleasure trip to Sydney and the comfort of a new gaol and a nate condimned cell all to yourself, well worth a man's blood, and a sure rope when the visit was over. Ha! ha!'

He laughed long and loud. The sound was so unnatural that Wilfred fancied if their talk had occurred by a lonely camp in a darksome forest at midnight, instead of under the garish light of day, he might have imagined faint unearthly cries and moans strangely mingled with that awful laughter.

'Thim was quare times; but I didn't go to "the island hell" after all. An up-country settler came to the barracks to pick a groom, as an assigned servant—so they called us. He was a big, bold-lookin' man, and as I set my eyes on him, I never looked before me or on the floor as most of thim did.

'"What's that man?" he said. "I like the look of him; he's got plenty of devil in him; that's my sort. He can ride, by the look of his legs. I'm just starting up-country."

'They wouldn't give me to him at first; said I was too bad to go loose. But he had friends in high places, and they got me assigned to him. Next day we started for a station. When I felt a horse between my legs I began to have the feelings of a man again. He gave me a pistol to carry, too. Bushrangers wor on the road then, and he carried money.'

'"You can fight or not, as you like, Tom," he said, if we meet any of the boys; but if you show cur, back you go to the barracks.'

'"Sooner to hell," says I. I felt that I would go through fire and water for him. He trated me liked a *man!*'

'And did you meet any bushrangers?' said Wilfred.

'We did then—the Tinker's gang—three of them, and a boy. They bailed us up in a narrow place. I took steady aim and shot the Tinker dead. As well him as me—not that I cared a traneen for my life. My master dropped a second man; the other one and the boy bolted for their lives.

'"Well done, Tom!" says my master, when it was all over. "You were a good cavalry man lost"—he was in the Hussars, no less, at home. "We don't part asy, I can tell you. You deserve your freedom, and you'll get it."

'He was betther than his word. I got a conditional pardon, not to go beyond the colonies. Sure I had little taste for lavin' them. I stayed with him till he died; the next place I went to was Warbrok, as I tould ye the first day I seen you.'

'Did you ever hear what became of your child?'

'Ne'er a one of me knows, nor cares. If he's turned out well, the less he knows of me the better. If he's gone to the dogs, there's scoundrels enough in the country already. But I nigh forget tellin' ye, I made money once by dalin' in cattle, and every year I sent home £50, thinkin' it might do good to the child.'

'And do you know if it went safe?'

'Sure I got a resate for every pound of it, just as if a lawyer had written it, thankin' me, but never sayin' a word about the boy, but that it would be used for his larning.'

'And what made you leave it off?'

'I didn't lave it off. They sent back the last of it without a word or message. That made me wild, and I started drinkin', and never cried crack till it was gone. I began to wander about and take billets as a stock-rider. 'Tis the way I've lived iver since. If it wasn't for the change and wild life now and thin—fightin' them divils of blacks, gallopin' after wild cattle, and campin' out where no white man had been before—I'd been dead with the drink long ago. But some-

thing keeps me; something tells me I can't die till I've seen one from the ould country. Who it is, I can't tell. Sometimes I see Mary in my drames, holdin' up the child like the last day I seen her. I'd have put a bullet through me, when I was in "the horrors," only for thim drames. I shall go when my time comes. It's little I'd care if it was in the night that's drawin' on.'

Here he rode on for some minutes without speaking, then continued in an altered voice:

'See here now, Mr. Wilfred, it's little I thought to say to mortial man the things I've let out of my heart this blessed day. But my feeling to you and your father is the same as I had to my first master—the heavens be his bed! If he'd always been among such people here—rale gintry—that cared for him and thought to help him, Tom Glendinning would maybe have been a different man. But the time's past. I'm like a beaten fox, nigh run down; and I'll never die in my bed, that much I know. You won't spake to me agen about this. My heart's burstin' as it is; and—I'll maybe drop—if it comes on me again—like it—does—now——'

He pressed his hand closely, fiercely, upon the region of the heart. He grew deadly pale, and shook as if in mortal agony; his face was convulsed as he bowed himself upon the saddle-bow, and Wilfred feared he was about to fall from his horse. But he slowly regained his position, and quivering like one who had been stretched upon the rack, guided his horse along the homeward path.

''Tis spasms of the heart, the doctor tould me it was,' he gasped at length. They'd take me off some day, before you could light a match, "if I didn't keep aisy and free from trouble," he said. 'Maybe they will, some day; maybe something else will be too quick for them. It's little I care. Close up, Mr. Wilfred, we're late for home, and I'd like to regulate thim calves before it's dark.'

Much Wilfred mused over the history of the strange old man who had now become associated with their fortunes.

'What a life!' thought he. 'What a tragedy! How changed from the days when he followed the Mayo hounds; reckless then, perhaps, and impatient of control, but an unweaned child in innocence compared to his present condition.

And yet he possessed qualities which, under different treatment might have led to honour and distinction.

. . . . . .

As far as personal claims to distinction were concerned, few districts in which the Effinghams could have been located, would have borne comparison with the vicinity of Lake William. It abounded, as we have told, in younger sons of good family, whom providence would appear to have thus guided but a few years before their own migration. This fortunate concurrence they had themselves often noted, and fully did they appreciate the congenial companionship.

Besides the local celebrities, few tourists of note passed along the southern road without being intercepted by the hospitality of one or other household. These captives of their bow and spear were shared honourably. When the Honourable Cedric Rotherwood, who had letters to Mr. Effingham, was quartered for a month at The Chase, fishing, shooting, and kangaroo-hunting, the Benmohr men and their allies were entreated to imagine there was a muster at The Chase every Saturday, and to rendezvous in force accordingly. A strong friendship accordingly was struck up between the young men. The Honourable Cedric was only five-and-twenty, and years afterwards, when Charlie Hamilton went home with one station in his pocket, and two more paying twenty per cent per annum upon the original outlay, his Lordship, having then come into his kingdom, had him down at Rotherwood Hall, and gave him such mounts in the hunting field, and such corners in the battues, not to mention a run over to his Lordship's deer forest in the Highlands, that Charlie, on befitting occasions, refers to that memorable visit with enthusiasm (and at considerable length, say his friends) even unto this day.

Against this court card, socially marked for the Effinghams' fortune, one day turned up a couple of trumps, which might be thought to have made a certainty of the odd trick in favour of Benmohr. Charles Hamilton, coming home after a day's ploughing, found two strangers in the sitting-room, one of whom, a quiet plainly dressed personage, shut up a book at his entrance, and begged to introduce his friend and travelling companion, Major Glendinning, 'who (his own name Kinghart) had brought a letter from a mutual

friend, he believed, Mr. Machell of Langamilli. The Major had been good enough to accompany him, being anxious to see the country.'

'Delighted to see you, I'm sure,' said Hamilton, pocketing the letter unread. 'I hope Mrs. Teviot gave you some refreshment. I seldom come home before dark, now the days are getting short.'

'The old lady did the honours, I assure you,' said the Major, 'but we preferred awaiting dinner, as we had tiffin on the road. As for Kinghart, he found an old edition in your book-case which was meat and drink to him.'

'In that case, if you will allow me, I will ask you to excuse me till the bell rings, as dressing is a serious business after my clay furrows.'

Hamilton had time to look at Willie Machell's letter, in which he found Mr. Kinghart described as an out-and-out brick, though reserved at first, and unreasonably fond of books. Played a goodish game of whist, too. Henry Kinghart was brother to the famous clergyman and writer of that name, and was so deuced clever that, if there had been any material for fiction in this confounded country, which there was not, he shouldn't be surprised if he wrote a book himself some day. As for the Major, he was invaluable. He (Machell) had met him at the Australian Club, and brought him up forcibly from Sydney. He was the best shot and horseman he ever saw, and fought no end with his regiment of Irregular Horse in India. Siffter, N.I., who denied everybody's deeds but his own, admitted as much. Relative in Australia—cattle-station manager or something—that he wanted to look up. He (Hamilton) was not to keep them all the winter at Benmohr, as he (Machell) was deucedly dull without them.

Mr. Kinghart fully answered his warranty, inasmuch as he volunteered little in the way of remark, and fastening upon one or two rare books in the Benmohr collection, hardly looked up till Mrs. Teviot came in with the bedroom candles. The Major seemed indisposed to literature, but had seen so much, and indeed had transacted personally so large a share of modern history in Indian military service, that Hamilton, who, like most Scottish gentlemen, had a brother in the line there and several cousins in the Civil

Service, was deeply interested. He had been in every battle of note since the commencement of the Mahratta war, and

> A scar on his brown cheek revealed
> A token true of 'Moodkee' field.

Without a shade of self-consciousness he replied to Hamilton's eager questionings, whom he found to be (from his brother's letters) accurately informed about the affairs of Northern India.

Unfortunately for Mr. Kinghart's studies, Neil Barrington and Bob Ardmillan turned up next morning—two men who would neither be quiet themselves, nor suffer other mortals to enjoy repose. Part of the day was spent in shooting round the borders of the dam, when the Major topped Ardmillan's bag, who was considered the crack shot of the neighbourhood. In the afternoon, there being many horses, colts and others, in the stables, Neil proposed an adjournment to the leaping-bar, an institution peculiar to Benmohr, for educating the inexperienced steeds to jump cleverly with the aid of a shifting bar enwrapped in brambles.

At this entertainment the Major showed himself to be no novice, riding with an ease of seat and perfection of hand, to which, doubtless, years of pig-sticking and tent-pegging had contributed.

In the evening whist was suggested, when Mr. Kinghart showed that his studies had by no means prevented his paying due attention to an exacting and jealous mistress. The exigencies of the game thawed his reserve, and in his new character he was pronounced by the volatile Neil and the shrewd satirist Bob Ardmillan to be a first-rate fellow. He displayed with some dry humour the results of a habit of close observation; in addition, a chance allusion served to reveal such stores of classical lore, that Argyll's absence was deplored by Neil Barrington, who believed that his friend, who was always scolding him for not keeping up his classics, would have been for once out-quoted.

Of course such treasures of visitors could not be allowed to lie hid, and after a few allusions to the family at The Chase had paved the way, Mr. Kinghart and the Major were invited to accompany Hamilton on a visit (which he unblushingly asserted to be chiefly on business) to that popular homestead on the next ensuing Saturday.

The Effingham family were devoted admirers of the elder and Kinghart, had but recently read and discussed *Eastward Ho*, *Dalton*, *Rocke* and other products of the large, loving mind which was then stirring the hearts of the most generous portion of English society. It may be conjectured with what secret triumph, veiled under an assumption of formal politeness, Hamilton introduced Major Glendinning and Mr. Henry Kinghart.

'Will you think me curious if I ask whether you are related to the Rector of Beverly?' inquired Rosamond soon after preliminaries had come to an end. 'You must pardon our enthusiasm, but life in the provinces seems as closely concerned with authors as with acquaintances or friends, almost more so.'

'My brother Charles would feel honoured, I assure you, Miss Effingham, if he knew the interest he has aroused in this far-off garrison of the Norseman he so loves to celebrate,' said the stranger, with a pleasant smile. 'I wish, for a hundred reasons, that he could be here to tell you so. How he would enjoy roaming over this land of wonders!'

Rosamond's eyes sparkled with an infrequent lustre. Here was truly a miraculous occurrence. A brother—actually a brother—of the great, the noble, the world-renowned Charles Kinghart, with whose works they had been familiar ever since they could read; most of whose characters were to them household words!

Certainly there was nothing heroic about the personnel of their literary visitor—an unobtrusive-looking personage. But now that he was decorated with the name of Kinghart, glorified with the reflected halo of genius, there was visible to the book-loving maiden a world of distinction in his every gesture and fragment of speech.

Then Major Glendinning, too, a man whom few would pass without a second glance. Slightly over middle height, his symmetrical figure and complete harmony of motion stamped him as one perfected by the widest experiences of training and action. 'Soldier' was written emphatically by years of imprint upon the fearless gaze, the imperturbable manner, the bronzed cheek, and accurate but unostentatious dress. A man who had shouldered death and had mocked danger; who had actually shed blood in action—'in single

fight and mixed array' (like Marmion, as Annabel said). Not in old, half-forgotten days, like their father, but in *last year's*, well-nigh last month's, deadly picturesque strife, of which the echoes were as yet scarcely silent. Annabel and Beatrice gazed at him as at a denizen of another planet, and left to Rosamond the more rare adoration which exalts the image of the scholar to a higher pedestal than that of the warrior.

There was, however, a sufficing audience and ample appreciation for both the recent lions, who were by no means suffered by their original captors to roar softly or feed undisturbed. Before sitting down to the unceremonious evening meal, Charles Hamilton begged Mrs. Effingham to defer leaving the drawing-room for a few moments while he made a needful explanation.

'You will not be surprised to hear, Mrs. Effingham,' he commenced, with an air of great deference, 'that Mr. Kinghart shares his distinguished brother's views as to our duties to the (temporarily) lower orders, and the compulsion under which the nobler minds of the century lie, to advance by personal sacrifice the social culture of their dependents, more particularly in the colonies, where (necessarily) the feelings are less sensitive. Mr. Kinghart, therefore, declines to partake of a meal in any house, unless the servants are invited to share the repast.'

'What nonsense!' said the gentleman referred to, rather hastily; 'but I daresay you recognise our friend's vein of humour, Mrs. Effingham.'

'It's all very well, Kinghart,' replied Hamilton gravely; 'but I feel pained to find a man of your intellect deserting his convictions when they clash with conventionalities. You know the Rector's opinions as to our dependents, and here you stand, ashamed to act up to the family principles.'

'My dear fellow, of course I support Charles's gallant testimony to the creed of his Master, but he had no "colonial experience," whereas I have had a great deal, which may have led me to believe that I am the deeper student of human nature. I don't know whether I need assure Mrs. Effingham that she will find me outwardly much like other people.'

'How few beliefs shall I retain henceforth,' said Hamilton sorrowfully.

'Putting socialism out of the question,' said Mr. Kinghart, 'I shall always regret that Charles did not avail himself of an opportunity he once had to visit Australia. He would have been charmed beyond description.'

'I'm sure *we* should have been, only to see him,' said Beatrice; 'but I don't know what we should have had to offer in exchange for what he would have to forgo.'

'You are leaving out of the question the fact of my brother's passionate love of geology, botany, and adventure. The facts in natural history to which even my small researches have led are so wonderful that I hesitate to assert them.'

'How fascinating it must be,' said Rosamond, 'to be able to walk about the earth and read the book of Nature like a scroll. You and our dear old Harley seem alike in that respect. I look upon you as magicians. You have the "open sesame," and may find the way to Ali Baba caverns full of jewels.'

'This last is not so wildly improbable, though you overrate my attainments,' said their visitor, with a quiet smile. 'I have certainly found in this neighbourhood indications of valuable minerals, not even excluding that Chief Deputy of the Prince of the Air—Gold.'

'Why, Kinghart, you are as mad as Mr. Sternworth,' said Hamilton. 'All *savants* have a craze for impossible discoveries. How *can* there be gold here?'

'I took Mr. Hamilton to be a gentleman of logical mind,' said the Englishman quietly. 'Why should not the sequences from geological premisses be as invariable in Australia as in any other other part of the globe. The South Pole does not invert the principle of cause and effect, I presume.'

'I did not mean that,' explained Hamilton, with something less than his ordinary decisiveness, 'but there seems something so preposterous in a gold-field in a new country like this.'

'It is not a new country, it is a very old one; there was probably gold here long before it was extracted from Ophir. But your men, in digging holes yesterday for the posts of that new hut, dislodged fragments of hornblendic granite slightly decomposed and showing minute particles of gold. I had not time to examine them, but I noted the formation accurately.'

'What then?' said his male hearers in a kind of chorus.

'What then? Why, it follows inexorably that we are standing above one of the richest goldfields in the known world!'

'But assuming for a moment, which God forbid,' said Hamilton, 'that gold—*real* gold—in minute quantities could be extracted from the stone you picked up, does it follow that rich and extensive deposits should be contiguous?'

'My dear Hamilton, you surely missed the geological course in your college studies! Gold once found amid decomposed hornblendic granite, in alluvial drifts in company with water-worn quartz, has *never* failed to demonstrate itself in wondrous wealth. In the Ural Mountains, in Mexico, and most likely in King Solomon's time, there were no *little* mines where once this precise formation was verified.'

'I devoutly trust that it may not be in our time,' said Argyll. 'What a complete overturn of society would take place; in Australia, of all places! I should lose interest in the country at once.'

'There might be inconvenience,' said Mr. Kinghart reflectively, 'but the Anglo-Saxon would be found capable of organising order. We need not look so far ahead. But of the day to come, when the furnace-chimney shall smoke on these hillsides, and miles of alluvial be torn up and riddled with excavations, I am as certain as that Glossopteris, of which I have seen at least three perfect specimens in shale, denotes coal deposits.'

'We must buy you out, Kinghart, that is the whole of it,' said Ardmillan, 'and direct your energies into some other channel. If you go on proving the existence of gold and black diamonds under these heedless feet of ours the social edifice will totter. Hamilton will abandon his agriculture, Argyll his stock-keeping, Churbett his reading and early rising, Mrs. Teviot will leave off cheese-making, Forbes will cease to contradict—in short, the whole Warbrok and Benmohr world will come to an end.'

'It is a very pleasant world, and I am sorry to have hinted at the flood which will some day sweep over it,' said Mr. Kinghart; 'but what is written is written, and indelibly, when the pages are tables of stones, set up from the foundation of the world.'

Most enjoyable and still well remembered were the days

which followed this memorable discussion. A succession of rides, drives, and excursions followed, in which Mr. Kinghart pointed out wonders in the world of botany, which caused Rosamond to look upon him as a sage of stupendous experiences.

To Howard Effingham the presence of Major Glendinning was an unalloyed pleasure. Familiar chiefly with service in other parts of the world, he was never tired of listening or questioning. Varied necessarily were incidents of warfare conducted against the wild border tribes of Hindostan with her hordes of savage horsemen. Such campaigns necessarily partook of the irregular modes of combat of the foe. Without attaching importance to his own share of distinction, their guest permitted his hearers to learn much of the picturesque and splendid successes of the British arms in the historic land of Ind.

For himself, his manner had a strange tinge of softness and melancholy. At one time his mien was that of the stern soldier, proud of the thoroughness with which a band of marauders had been extirpated, or the spirit of a dissolute native ruler broken. Scarcely had the tale been told when a settled sadness would overspread his face, as if in pity for the heathens' spoil and sorrow. To his hearers, far from war's alarms, there was a strong, half-painful fascination in these tales of daring, heightened by the frequent presence of death in every shape of hot-blooded carnage or military execution.

'How difficult it is to imagine,' said Beatrice one day, suddenly arousing herself, after staring with dilated eyeballs at the Major, who had been recounting a realistic incident for Guy's special edification (how the Ranee of Jeypore had hanged a dozen of his best troopers, and of the stern reprisal which he was called upon to make), 'that you, actually sitting here quietly with us, are one and the same person who was chief actor in these fearful doings. What a wonderful change it must be for you.'

'Let me assure you,' said the Major, 'that it is a most pleasant change. I am tired of soldiering, and my health is indifferent. I almost think that if I could fish out this old uncle of mine, I should be content to settle in the bush, and take to rural life for the rest of my days.'

'Don't you think you would find it awfully dull?' said Annabel; 'you would despise all our life so much. Unless there happened to be an outbreak of bushrangers, you might never have a chance of killing any one again, as long as you lived.'

'I could manage without that excitement. I have had enough, in all conscience, to last a lifetime. The climate of your country suits us old Indians so well. If I were once fairly established, I think I could rear horses and cattle, especially the former, with great contentment.'

'There is no one of your name in this part of the country,' said Guy, 'except our old stock-rider, Tom. He's such a queer old fellow. I remember asking him what his surname was one day, and he told me it was Glendinning. He's away now, mustering at Wangarua.'

'It is not an uncommon name where my family lived,' said the Major. 'I should like to see him if he is a namesake. He may have heard of the person I am in search of.'

The whole party was extremely sorry to permit their guests to depart; but after a few days spent in luxurious intercourse, during which sight-seeing and sport were organised day by day, and every imaginable book and author reviewed with Mr. Kinghart in the evening, while Guy had fully made up his mind to go to India, and had got up Indian history from the Mogul dynasty to the execution of Omichund, a parting had to be made. It was only temporary, however, as Mr. Kinghart had promised to visit an old schoolfellow long settled at Monaro, and after a fortnight's stay had promised to return this way with the Major before they said farewell finally. At Warbrok Chase there was great dismay at the inevitable separation.

'I declare,' said Annabel, 'that I begin to doubt whether it is prudent to make such delightful acquaintances. One is so dreadfully grieved when they depart. It is much better to have everyday friends, who can't run away, isn't it?'

'And who mightn't be much missed if they did; quite so, Miss Annabel,' said Forbes, to whom this lament was made.

'Oh, of course *you* are different at Benmohr and just about here. We are all one family, and should be a very united one if Mr. Churbett would leave off teasing me about what silly people say, and Mr. Forbes would give up his

sarcasms, Mr. Hamilton his logic, Mr. Argyll his tempers, and so on. How I could improve you all, to be sure! But I mean friends—that is, strangers—like Mr. Kinghart and Major Glendinning, that are birds of passage. I can't explain myself; but I'm sure there's something true and new about the idea.'

'It may be quite true that young ladies prefer recently acquired friends to those of long standing, but I am afraid it is not altogether new in the history of the sex,' said Mr. Forbes. 'Still I think I understand you, Miss Annabel. Which of the illustrious strangers do *you* chiefly honour with your regrets, Miss Beatrice?'

'I mourn over Mr. Kinghart,' said Beatrice, with instinctive defensive art. 'He is a library that can talk, and yet, like a library, prefers silence. I wonder if one would ever get tired of listening to him, and having everything so delightfully explained. He is sarcastic about women, too. Perhaps he has been ill-treated by some thoughtless girl. I should like to wither her.'

'Why don't you comfort him, Beatrice? Your love for reading would just suit, or perhaps not suit,' said Annabel. 'You would have to toss up which was to order dinner or make tea. I can see you both sitting in easy-chairs, with your foreheads wrinkled up, reading away the whole evening. I wonder if two poets or two authors ever agreed in married life? Of course, he might scratch out her adjectives, or she might sneer at his comic element. But, do you know, a thought strikes me. Don't you see a likeness to some one in the Major that you've seen before? I do, and it haunts me.'

'No, I never saw any one the *least* like him; his expression, his figure, his way of walking, riding, and talking are quite different from other people. How a man's life moulds him! I am sure I could tell what half the men I see have been or *not* been, quite easily, by their appearance and ways.'

'But did you notice his eyes?'

'Well, they are soft, and yet piercing, which is unusual; but that is all.'

'On second thoughts I won't say, lest I might be thought less sensible even than I am. I have no capital to fall back upon in that respect.'

'You do say such odd things, my dear Annabel. I think you ought to get on with our last duet. You only half know your part.'

That a certain reaction follows hard upon the most unalloyed pleasure is conceded. The dwellers at The Chase recognised a shade of monotony, even of dulness, falling upon their uneventful lives as the friends and visitors departed.

CHAPTER XVI

'SO WE'LL ALL GO A-HUNTING TO-DAY'

THE cheering results of this season of prosperity were not without effect upon the sanguine temperament of Howard Effingham. Prone to dismiss from his mind all darkly-shaded outlines, he was ever eager to develop projects which belong to the enjoyments rather than to the acquisitions of life. Few human beings had commenced with a smaller share of foresight. *He* required no exhortation to refrain from taking heed for the morrow and its cares. For him they could hardly be said to exist, so little did he realise in advance the more probable evils.

The time had arrived, in his opinion, to dwell less fixedly upon the problem of income. The greater question of cultured living could no longer be neglected. All danger of poverty and privation overtaking the family being removed, Mr. Effingham for some time past had devoted his mind to the assimilation of the lives of himself and his neighbours to those of the country gentlemen of his own land. Something he had already effected in this way. He had received a shipment of pheasants and partridges, which, in a suitable locality, were making headway against their natural enemies. Much of his time was spent, gun in hand, clearing the haunts of the precious Gallinæ from the unsparing dasyurus (the wild cat of the colonists), while Guy's collection of stuffed hawks had increased notably. Orders had been given to shoot every one that could be seen, from the tiny merlin, chiefly devoted to moths and grasshoppers, to the wedge-tailed eagle eight feet between the wings, discovered on a mighty iron-bark tree, thence surveying the bright-plumaged

strangers. Hares, too, and rabbits had been liberated, of which the latter had increased with suspicious rapidity.

Coursing, fishing, shooting, all of a superior description, Howard Effingham now saw with prophetic vision established for the benefit of his descendants at The Chase. They would be enabled to enjoy themselves befittingly in their seasons of leisure, and cadets of the House, when they visited England, would not have to blush for their ignorance of the out-door accomplishments of their kinsfolk. In imagination he saw

> The merry brown hares come leaping
> Over the crest of the hill,

or starting from their 'forms' in the meadows which bordered the lake. He saw the partridge coveys rise from the stubbles, and heard once more the whirr of the cock pheasant as he 'rocketted' from the copse of mimosa saplings. He saw carp, tench, and brown trout in the clear mountain streams, and watched far down the Otsego 'laker' in the still depths of their inland bay. At the idea of these triumphs, which long years after his bones rested in an exile's grave, would be associated with the name of Howard Effingham, his heart swelled with proud anticipation. But there was one deficiency as yet unfilled; one difficulty hitherto not confronted. Much had been attempted, even something done. Why should he not be more nobly daring still? Why not organise that sport of kings, that eminently British pastime, nowhere enjoyed in perfection, hitherto, outside of the 'happy isles'? *Why not go in for fox-hunting?* Could its transplantation be possible?

True, the gladdening variety of pasture and plough, meadow and woodland, over which hound and horse sweep rejoicingly in Britain, was not possible in the neighbourhood. Hedges and ditches, brooks and banks, as yet gave not change and interest to the programme while educating horse and rider. Still, he would not despair.

In the pensive, breezeless autumn, or the winter mornings, when the dew lay long on the tall grass, and the soft, hazy atmosphere gradually struggled into the brilliant Australian day, could there be better scenting weather? Would not the first cry of the hounds, as a dozen couples, to begin with, hit off the scent of a dingo or a blue forester, sound like a

forgotten melody in his ears? There would be an occasional fence to give the boys emulative interest; for the rest, a gallop in the fresh morn through the park-like woodlands, or even across the spurs of the ranges, would be worth riding a few miles to enjoy. All the neighbours—now making money fast and not indisposed for amusement—would be glad to join. A better lot of fellows no Hunt ever numbered amongst its subscribers. Subscription? Well, he supposed it must be so. It would be a proprietary interest, and he was afraid Wilfred would object to the whole burden of maintenance falling upon the resources of The Chase.

This brilliant idea was not suffered to lapse for want of expansion. Energetic and persistent in the domain of the abstract or the unprofitable, Howard Effingham at once communicated with a few friends. He was surprised at the enthusiasm which the project evoked. A committee was formed, comprising the names of the Benmohr firm, Churbett, Ardmillan, Forbes, and the D'Oyleys, besides Robert Malahyde, a neighbour of Hampden's and an enthusiastic sportsman. Never was a more happy suggestion. It pleased everybody. O'Desmond declared that the very idea recalled 'The Blazers'; he felt himself to be ten years younger as he put down his name for a handsome subscription on the spot. Fred Churbett had always known that Duellist was thrown away as a hackney; and now that there was something more to be jumped than the Benmohr leaping-bar, did not care how early he got up. This announcement was received with shouts of incredulous laughter.

Wilfred alone was not enamoured of this new project. He foresaw direct and, still more serious, indirect expenses. It was no doubt a great matter to have even the semblance of the Great English Sport revived among them. Still, business was business. If this sort of thing was to be encouraged, there was no knowing where it would stop. He himself would be only too glad to have a run now and then, but his instinctive feeling was that he would be better employed attending to his cattle and consolidating the prosperity, which now seemed to be flowing in with a steady tide.

In truth, of late, affairs had commenced to take a most encouraging, even intoxicating turn for the better. The

whole trade of the land—pastoral, commercial, and agricultural—was in a satisfactory condition, owing chiefly to unprecedentedly good seasons. All the Australian colonies, more particularly New South Wales, have within them elements of vast, well-nigh illimitable development. Nothing is needed but ordinary climatic conditions to produce an amount of material well-being, which nothing can wholly displace. The merchants of the cities, the farmers of the settled districts, the squatters of the far interior, were alike prospering and to prosper, it seemed, indefinitely. The export trade, Mr. Rockley assured him, had increased astonishingly, while the imports had so swelled that England would soon have to look upon Australia as one of her best customers.

'So you are going to have a pack of foxhounds in your neighbourhood, Mr. Effingham?' said Mrs. Rockley. 'I think it a splendid idea. Chrissie and I will ride over and see one of your meets, if you ask us.'

Then did Wilfred begin solemnly to vow and declare that the chief reason he had for giving the idea his support was, that perhaps the ladies at Rockley Lodge might be induced to attend a meet sometimes; otherwise, he confessed he thought it a waste of money.

'Oh, you mustn't be over-prudent, Mr. Effingham. Mr. Rockley says you Lake William people are getting alarmingly rich. You must consider the unamused poor a little, you know. It is a case of real distress, I assure you, sometimes in Yass when all you men take fits of hard work and staying at home. Now hunting is such a delightful resource in winter time.'

'Every one in our neighbourhood has joined,' said Wilfred, 'but we shall want more subscriptions if we are to become a strong Hunt club.'

'Put me down,' said Mr. Rockley. 'I haven't much time, but I might take a turn some day. Hampden, the Champions, Malahyde, Compton, and Edward Bellfield are most eager. Bob Clarke wrote forwarding their subscriptions, though they live rather far off. They hope to have a run now and then for their money.'

'I think I shall ask your father to let me work him a pair of slippers,' said Miss Christabel, 'or an embroidered waist-

coat, if he would like it better. He deserves the thanks of every girl in the district for his delightful idea and his spirited way of carrying it out. I hope some of us won't take to riding jealous, but I wouldn't answer for it if ever Mrs. Snowden and I get together. I'll tell you who could cut us both down.'

'And who may that be?' asked Wilfred.

'Why, Vera Fane, of course. Didn't you know that she rode splendidly? When she was quite a little child she used to gallop after the cattle at Black Mountain, where they live, and they say, though she is very quiet about it, that she can ride *anything*.'

'What sort of a place is this Black Mountain? It hasn't altogether a sound of luxury.'

'Oh, it's a terrible place, I believe, for poor Vera to have to live in always,' said the good-natured Christabel. 'They say it is as much as you can do to ride there, it's so rough, and they had to pack all their stores, I believe, till the new road was made. And they're very poor. Mr. Fane is one of those men who never make money or do anything much except read all day. If it wasn't for Vera, who teaches her brothers (she's the only girl), and keeps the accounts, and looks after the stores, and manages the servants, and does a good deal of the housework herself, the whole place would go to ruin.'

'Apparently, if such a good genius was to be withdrawn; but why doesn't her father sell out and go away? There are plenty of other stations to be got in more habitable places.'

'Oh, his wife is buried there—no wonder she died, poor thing. He won't hear of leaving the place; and I really believe, lonely as it is, that Vera likes it too. She is a wonderful girl, always teaching herself something, when she isn't darning stockings, or cooking, or having a turn at the wash-tub, for Nelly Jones, who stayed with her one summer, told me that they lost their servant once, and Vera *did everything* for a month. Sometimes she gets out, as she did to the races last year, and she enjoys that, as you may believe.'

'I hope she does,' said Wilfred reflectively. 'I thought her a very nice girl, but I had no idea she was such a paragon.'

'She's a grand girl, and an ornament to her sex,' said Mr.

Rockley suddenly. 'I couldn't have believed such a woman was possible, but I stopped there a week once, weatherbound. All the creeks were up, and as you had to cross the river about fifty times to get out of the confounded hole, I was bound to let the water go down. I should have hanged myself looking at old Fane's melancholy phiz and listening to the rain, if it hadn't been for Miss Fane. But I'll tell you all about her another time. I must be off now. You'll stay to dinner? I'll find you here, I suppose, when I come back.'

. . . . . .

If Howard Effingham could only have bent his mind with the same unflagging perseverance to matters of material advantage that he devoted to the establishment of the Lake William Hunt, he would have been a successful man in any country. Never would he have needed to quit his ancestral home.

In some enterprises everything appears to go contrary from the commencement. Hindrances, breakdowns, and mortifications of all kinds arise, as it were, out of the earth. On the other hand, occasionally, it appears as though 'the stars in their courses fought *for* Sisera.' The Hunt scheme had its detractors, who looked upon it as unnecessary and injurious, if, indeed, it were not also impossible. These amiable reviewers were discomfited. The sportsmen communicated with proved sympathetic. All sent a couple or two of hounds, above the average of gift animals; and one gentleman, relinquishing his position of M.F.H. in Tasmania, shipped the larger portion of his pack, firmly refusing to accept remuneration. He further stated that he should feel amply compensated by hearing of their successful incorporation in the Hunt of so well known a sporting centre as that of Lake William.

A kennel had been put up, of course, by Dick Evans. He had the dash and celerity of a ship carpenter, ensuring stability, but avoiding precision, the curse of your average mechanic. His colleague, old Tom, who grumbled at most innovations, was, wonderful to relate, in a state of enthusiasm.

Everybody in the district had a couple of hunters, it seemed, which he desired to get into condition, a task for which there had never before been sufficient inducement. Stalls and boxes were repaired, and the tourist through the famed district which lay around Lake William was enabled to report

that nowhere in Australia had he seen such an array of well-bred, well-conditioned horses.

Eventually, all necessary preparations were completed. Ten or twelve couple of hounds had been got together, had been regularly exercised, and, thanks to old Tom's efficient services as whip, persuaded to confine themselves to one kangaroo at a time, also to follow the scent in early morn with a constancy truly remarkable, considering the characters which they mostly enjoyed. So forward were all things, so smoothly had the machinery worked, that after several councils of war a day was at length fixed for the formal establishment of the 'Lake William Hunt Club.'

Notices and invitations were sent out in all directions. Even here fortune favoured them. It so happened that Hampden and St. Maur, with the Gambiers and a few more *esprits forts*, had business (real, not manufactured) which compelled their presence within such distance as permitted attendance. John Hampden was supposed to ride to hounds in such fashion that he had few equals. Formerly, in Tasmania, a Master of Hounds himself, his favourite hunter, The Caliph, was even now a household word.

Such a glorious season, too! Why does not Nature more frequently accommodate us with such easy luxuries—weather wherein every one is prosperous, easy of mind, and, as a natural consequence, charitably disposed? Everybody's stock was looking well. Prices were high and rising. There was a report gaining ground of rich lands having been discovered and settlements formed in the far south. That fact meant increased demand for stock, and so tended to make all things more serene, if possible. Nobody was afraid to leave home, no bush fires were possible at this time of year, the stock were almost capable of minding themselves, and if a man had a decent overseer, why, he might go to England without imprudence. Such was the wondrous concurrence of fortune's favours.

The great and glorious day arrived. Following the run of luck which had marked the whole enterprise, its beauty would have rejoiced the heart of any M.F.H. in the three kingdoms.

As the party commenced to assemble on the green knoll which lay in front of the garden fence in view of the lake,

all connoisseurs united in the verdict that there could not have been invented a better scenting day. There had been rain lately, and during the night anxiety had been felt lest a downpour might mar the enjoyment of the unprecedented pastime.

Too kind, however, were the elements. The hazy dawn had gradually yielded to a sunrise toned by masses of slowly moving soft grey clouds. The air, saturated with moisture, became mild and spring-like as the morning advanced. The wind changed to a few points nearer west and gradually lulled to an uncomplaining monotone. The thick, green, glistening sward, though reasonably damp, was firm and kindly in the interests of the contending coursers. It was a day of days, a day of promise, of fullest justification of existence. In such a day hope returns to each heart, strong and triumphant; care is a lulled and languid demon, and sorrow an untranslated symbol.

Nearly all the ladies who were to assist at the grand ceremonial had ridden or driven over the night before. Warbrok was nearly as fully occupied as Rockley Lodge had been at the races. It was many a day since the old walls had included so large and mirthful a party, had listened to such joyous babble, had echoed to like peals of innocent laughter.

Of course, the fair Christabel and her mother were early invited guests. They had brought a girl cousin. Mrs. Snowden had also asked leave to bring a friend staying with her at the time. Miss Fane had, of course, been entreated by Mrs. Effingham to be sure to come, but that young lady had written, sorrowfully, to decline as Dr. Fane was absent on business. A postscript, partially reassuring, stated that he was expected home the next day, and if the writer could possibly manage it she might ride part of the way to Warbrok and join some friends who were to come to the breakfast. But this was a hazardous supposition, too good to come off. Deep regret was expressed at The Chase on the receipt of this note, but the world went on nevertheless, as it does in default of all of us.

Can I essay to describe the array of dames and demoiselles, knights and squires and retainers, yeomen, men-at-arms, and others of low degree, who, on that ever-memorable autumn

morn, trampled the green meadow in front of old Warbrok House? Many a day has passed since the shadows of the waving forest trees flecked the greensward, since the hillside resounded to horse-hoof and jingling bridle, while mirthful words and silvery laughter blended ever and anon with the unaccustomed bay of the foxhound.

Ah me! Of the manly forms and bold, eager brows of those who kept tryst that day, how many have gone down before the onset of battle, the arrow of pestilence, the thousand haps of a colonist's life? The stark limbs are bowed, the bold eyes dimmed, the strong hearts tamed by the slow sorcery of Time—even of those o'er whom the forest tree sighs not, or the wild wave moans no requiem.

How many of that fair company have ridden away for ever into the Silent Land! What bright eyes have forgotten to shine! How many a joyous tone is heard no more!

> The halls her bright smile lighted up of yore,
> Are lonely now!

Gone to the Valhalla, doubtless, are many brave souls of heroes; but in the good year of grace eighteen hundred and thirty-six the chances of life's battle sat but lightly on the gallant troop that reined up at the first meet at Warbrok Chase. Many a goodly muster of the magnates of the land had been held in that home of many memories ere this; but never within the ken of the oldest chronicler had anything occurred so successful, so numerously attended, of such great and general interest to the district or neighbourhood.

Resolved that all the concomitants and accessories should be as thoroughly English as could in any way be managed, Howard Effingham had personally superintended the details of a Hunt breakfast, such as erstwhile he had often enjoyed or dispensed within the bounds of Merrie England.

> North and south, and east and west,
> The 'visitors' came forth,

as though minded to give the Squire of Warbrok—a name by which Howard Effingham was commencing to be known in the neighbourhood—a substantial acknowledgment of the interest taken by the country-side in his highly commendable

enterprise. The younger squatters, then, as now, the aristocracy of the land, mustered gallantly in support of the hereditary pastime of their order. A list might be attempted, were it only like the names of the ships in Homer's *Iliad*, some day to be read to curious listening ears by one unknowing of aught save that such, in the dear past, were the names of heroes.

But no thought of the irony of fate fell darkly on the merry party issuing from The Chase to greet the Badajos and Benmohr contingents, as they came up from opposite directions. With Harry O'Desmond rode a tall man in a green hunting frock, whose length of limb and perfect seat showed off the points of an inestimable grey of grand size and power, whom all men saw at once to be The Caliph, well known on both sides of the Straits. It was in truth John Hampden's famous hunter, a very Bayard among horses, at whom no horse-loving junior could look without tears in his eyes.

Of that party also were the Gambiers—Alick, Jimmy, and Jack—with their friend Willie Machell. A trio of cheerful hard-riding young squatters, having made names for themselves as leading dare-devils where anything dangerous was to be done with the aid of horse-flesh. Their 'Romeo' five-year-olds, with matchless shoulders, but imperfect tempers, carried them admirably. Will Machell was a tall, mild, gentlemanlike, musical personage, by no means so 'hard' as his more robust friends. He would be available as a chaperon for the feminine division, as he did not intend to do more than canter a mile or two after the throw-off.

Came from the broad river-flats and forest parks of the Murray, Claude Waring and his partner Rodder, the former tall, dark, jovial; the latter neat, prudent, and fresh-coloured.

Came from the volcanic cones and scoria-covered plateaus of Willaree the broad frame and leonine visage of Herman Bottrell. He was well carried by his square-built ambling cob, while beside him on a dark bay five-year-old, with the blood of Tramp in his veins, sat the well-known figure of 'Dolly' Goldkind, a man who in his day had shared the costliest pleasures of the *haute volée* of European capitals. Commercial vicissitudes in his family had forced him to importune fortune afresh in the unwonted guise of an Australian squatter. She had, in this instance, not disdained to 'favour the brave,' and Dolly was now in a fair way to see the pavement of the

Faubourg St. Germain once yet again, and to bask amid the transient splendour of the Tuileries. He had faced gallantly his share of uncongenial solitude, unadorned Nature, and rude surroundings, always awaiting, with the philosophy born of English steadfastness, and Parisian *insouciance*, the good time coming.

Came Bernard Wharton, bronzed by the fierce unshadowed sun of that dread waste where clouds rarely linger or the blessed rains of heaven are known to fall. His last whoo-hoop had been heard in his own county, in the ancestral land. His blue eye was bright, and his smile ready, as though he had known naught but lightsome toil and the sport of his Northamptonshire forefathers.

Ardmillan, Forbes, and Neil Barrington, with all the 'Benmohr mob,' as they were familiarly called, were in the vanguard. Neil Barrington possessed one valuable attribute of the horseman, inasmuch as he was ready, like Bob Clarke, to ride anything and at anything. No man had ever seen Neil decline a mount or a fence, however unpromising. But his skill was inferior to his zeal, usually provoking comment from the bystanders.

On one of these occasions, when he had hit a top rail very hard in an amateur steeplechase, an expostulatory friend said, 'Why don't you lift your horse, Neil?'

'Lift, be d—d!' replied the indignant Neil; 'I've enough to do to stick on.'

However, being muscular, active, and fearless, Neil's star had hitherto favoured him, so that he was generally well up at the finish.

One needs a staunch horse for 'cutting out' work, but the great raking Desborough which Bob Clarke brought with him was surely too good to be knocked about in the Benmohr bogs and volcanic trap 'rises' at a muster, while his condition savoured more of the loose-box than the grass paddock. Bob was one of those fortunate individuals that every one everywhere, male and female, gentle and simple, is glad to welcome. So there was no dissentient to the view of duty he had adopted but Mr. Rockley. And though that gentleman stated it as his opinion that Master Bob would have been better at home minding his work if he ever intended to make money, he extended the right hand of fellowship to him, and was as

gracious as all the world and distinctly the world's wife (and probably daughter) was wont to be.

There were those who thought that Christabel Rockley's eyes glowed with a deeper light after Bob's coming was announced. But such an occasion would have brightened the girl's flower-like face even if Bob had been doomed to eat his heart the while in solitude and disappointment on the far Mondarlo Plain.

'None of the ladies who belonged to "our set," and could ride at all, were absent,' Neil Barrington remarked, 'except Miss Fane; and it was a beastly shame she was prevented from coming—most likely by that old Turk of a father of hers. It was a real pleasure to see her ride, and now they were all done out of it.'

Just as Neil had concluded his lamentation for Vera Fane, who had won his heart by comforting him after one of his tumbles, saying that she never saw any one who rode so straight without turning out a horseman in the end, the Granville party, who had a long distance to come, made their appearance through the trees of the north gully, and there, on the well-known bonnie brown Emigrant, between Jack Granville and his sister Katie, was Vera Fane, or the evil one in her sweet guise.

So the grateful Neil was appeased, and straightway modified his language with respect to Dr. Fane's parental shortcomings; while Wilfred Effingham, who never denied his interest in the young lady—chiefly, he avowed, as a study of character—felt more exhilarated than he could account for. The Granvilles were congratulated, first of all upon their own appearance, and assured they were not at all late (Rockley had been devoting them to the infernal deities for the last half-hour), then upon their thoughtful conduct in bringing Miss Fane.

'Deal of trouble, of course,' quoth Jack Granville. 'Miss Fane is one of that sort, ain't she? She rode over with a small black boy for an escort, and roused us up about midnight. Nearly shot her, didn't I, Katie?'

'I'm afraid I frightened you,' said Miss Fane, with an apologetic expression, 'but papa had only just come home from Sydney. I knew if I missed this eventful day I should never have such another chance, so I lifted up Wonga by his

hair, poor child, to wake him, and then started off for a night ride.'

There was no time for further amenities, as the Master, triumphant and distinguished in the eyes of the Australian-born portion of the Hunt, gorgeous in buckskins, accurate top-boots, and a well-worn pink, moved off with fourteen couple of creditable foxhounds. A very fair, even-looking lot they were admitted to be. Old Tom had proved an admirable whip, displaying a keenness in the vocation which verified the tales with which he had regaled his acquaintances as to feats and frolics with the Blazers in the historic County Galway, in the kingdom of Long Ago.

A roan cob, with a reputation for unequalled feats in the jumping line, had, after many trials, been secured by Wilfred as a 'safe conveyance' for his father. He was, indeed, an extraordinary animal; the sort that some elderly gentlemen are always talking about and never seem able to get.

Wallaby was a red roan, low set, of great power and amazing activity. 'He could jump anything,' his former owner declared, 'and was that fond of it, as you could lead him up to this 'ere three-railed fence with a halter and he'd clear it and jump back without pulling it out of your hand.' This he proceeded to do before Wilfred and his father, after which there was no question as to his cross-country capability.

Not above 14 hands 2 inches in height, with short legs, his neat head and neck, with sloping shoulders and short back, ranked him as fit to carry a bishop or a banker in Rotten Row. His thighs and gaskins showed where the jumping came from. Besides these excellences, he was quiet, fast, and easy in his paces; so that Mrs. Effingham and the girls had no anxiety about the head of the house when so mounted.

CHAPTER XVII

THE FIRST MEET OF THE LAKE WILLIAM HUNT CLUB

'WHAT a delightful sight!' said Miss Fane to Rosamond; 'and how glad I am that I was so determined to come. I have rather a craze for horses, I know, but doesn't it look magnificent. What an array! Everybody within a hundred miles must be here. I feel as if I could go out of my senses with excitement. This is strictly between ourselves. But of course you have seen far larger fields.'

'I was too young before I left home for much in the hunting way,' said Rosamond, 'but I was taken to see a throw-off now and then on the first day of the season.'

'What was it like? A much finer sight than this?'

'We cannot, of course, compete in appointments—the Hunt servants so neatly got up; the huntsman such a picture, with his weather-beaten face, and the whips so smart and trim. Then the grey-haired squires on their favourite hunters give such a tone to the affair. But we have good horses out to-day, including yours and mine, which would not be unnoticed, even that dear Fergus. He wonders what it is all about.'

'And the scenery and the belongings?'

'Well, a lawn in front of a grand historic mansion that has been besieged more than once since the Wars of the Roses must have the *pas* over anything in Australia. Still, as for scenery, it was often tame, and scarcely came up to that.'

Here she pointed with her whip as the hounds spread eagerly over a grassy flat immediately beneath them. They had been for some time imperceptibly ascending a slope.

The mists which had shrouded the mountain-tops had rolled back, and a panorama of grand and striking beauty stood revealed. Westward lay the lake, a silver sheet, amid the green slopes which marked its shores. On the south rose sheer and grim the enormous darkened cone which terminated the mountain range which they had approached. The released effulgence of the morning sun magically transfigured to purple masses the outline of the curving ridge, before crowning it with a tremulous aureole. Trending westerly, the level ground increased in width, until, but for its groves of eucalyptus, it might have been dignified by the name of plain. This gradually merged into a region of park-like forest.

'What a charming place for a gallop!' said Christabel Rockley. 'I do so hope the fox, or whatever he is, will be found here. I should not be afraid to ride fast over this nice, clear country.'

'It is almost too easy,' said Miss Fane, drawing her bridle-rein, as she watched old Tom closely. I like forest and range work, I must confess. But we must look out, or the hounds will be away, and we shall be left lamenting like so many Lord Ullins.'

The girl's instinct had not deceived her. She had ridden many a day at her father's side, when the shy cattle of a neglected herd, ready for headlong speed at the snapping of a twig, needed quick following to live with. Keeping her eye on old Tom, she had noted the signs of an approaching start.

A leading hound ran along a cattle track, and giving tongue, went off at score. Three or four comrades of position followed suit, and in the shortest possible time the whole pack was away, running with a breast high scent.

'The black dingo for a thousand,' said old Tom to the Master, as he hustled Boney alongside of the roan cob. 'I seen Hobart Gay Lass put up her bristles the minit she settled to the scent. It's a true tongue the slut has, and I'll back her against 'ere a dog of the English lot, though there's good hounds among them. We'll have the naygur to-day, if there's vartue in a good scent and a killing pack.'

'Then you know him, Tom?'

'By coorse, I do; he killed Strawberry's calf, and didn't

I go down on my two knees and swear I'd have the heart's blood of him.'

'Then how did you manage to lay the hounds on him here—I thought he was a lake dog?'

'Divil a doubt of it; but I seen him here one day, just under the range, pinning a "joey," and I kept lavin' a bit of mate for him, just to make him trot over regular—maybe a bullock's heart or a hock of a heifer's calf, maybe a bird I'd shot. Dingoes is mortial fond of birds. I seen his tracks here yesterday, and med sure he'd be here wonst more, for the last time, and here he is forenint us now—glory be to God!'

'Then he's safe to be a straight goer?'

'It's twelve mile to the lake, and he'll make for the little rise, where there's rocks, just before you come to Long Point. If he's pushed there, he'll maybe turn to the Limestone Hill, at the back of the big house, where there's caves —my curse on thim—and then good-bye.'

'This is pretty country, if there was more fencing,' said the Master. 'Perhaps it is as well, though, as there are so many ladies out. The hounds are running like smoke.'

The nature of the ground at this point of the hunt was such as to admit of all being reasonably well up. True, the pack went at considerable speed. The scent was burning, and there were no small enclosures, as in 'Merrie England,' to check the more delicate damsels or inexperienced horsemen. The sward was sound and firm, the tall-stemmed eucalypti stood far apart in the southern forest-park. Bob Clarke and the Benmohr division, Hampden and the Gambiers, rode easily in front. Rosamond, Miss Rockley, Miss Fane, and a few other ladies, who were exceptionally well mounted, had no difficulty in keeping their places.

'So this is fox-hunting!' said Miss Fane. 'That is, so far as we can have the noble sport without the fox. It is nice to see the hounds running so compactly. And I like the musical composite cry with its harmonies and variations.'

'This dingo,' said Wilfred, who had established himself at her bridle-rein, 'is running very straight and fast. If he makes for the range behind the house, we shall see him and have a little fencing too.'

'I don't object to a jump or two,' said the young lady, 'if they are not too stiff. This is the sort of pace that enables one to look about. But I should like to see the hounds work a little more.'

While this conversation was proceeding, every one was at their ease, and voted the sport most delightful. The front rankers were sailing along, while the hounds were carrying a good head and forcing Master Dingo along at a pace which prevented him from availing himself of one or two hiding-places.

However, just as Rosamond had compared herself to the Landgrave, in the German ballad, sweeping on in endless chase, with a horseman on either hand—St. Maur on the right on a coal-black steed, and Fred Churbett on the left on the rejoicing Duellist—wondering how long they were going to have such a pleasant line of country, through which Fergus was luxuriously striding as if he had commenced the first part of a fifty-mile stage, the scene changed. The confident pack checked, and commenced a circular performance which betrayed indecision, if not failure of scent.

'What's the matter?' said Miss Fane. 'Is the whole thing over? Was the dingo a myth?'

'We have overrun the scent, Miss Fane,' said Wilfred with dignity. 'The hounds have checked, but we shall hit it off again in a few minutes.'

He had hardly finished speaking when Miss Fane, who, if it was her first day after hounds, had 'kept her side' well up for many a day in early girlhood, 'when they wheeled the wild scrub cattle at the yard,' took her horse by the head, with a rapid turn towards two couple of hounds that she had descried racing down the side of a creek. A neat jump, following old Tom over the narrow but deep water-course at a bend, placed her on easy terms with the pack. A new line of country lay spread out before them at right angles to their late course.

The hounds had now settled again to the scent. Another 'blind' creek, waterless, but respectable in the jumping way, lay in front. At this Miss Fane's horse went so fast and took so extensive a fly, that Wilfred felt himself compelled to be hard on his Camerton chestnut and ride, if he intended to keep his place in the front alongside of this 'leading lady,' as Miss Fane's nerve and experience entitled her to become.

But the rest of the field were not doomed to defeat and extinction, although Miss Fane's knowledge of emergencies had enabled her to fix the moment when the scent was recovered.

Scarcely did the hounds swing to their line, for the dingo had turned, at right angles, in the creek, and so occasioned the outrunning of the scent, when Forbes, Ardmillan, Neil Barrington, and Fred Churbett were seen coming up hand over hand. Miss Effingham's 'dear Fergus' was slipping along with his wonted graceful ease, and permitting the interchange of a few sentences with Mr. Churbett, who rode at her bridle-rein. Hampden, with whom was Beatrice, on Allspice, was riding wide of the hounds, but only waiting for serious business to show what manner of work he and The Caliph were wont to cut out for themselves. Bob Clarke, wonderful to relate, was *not* among the first flight. It could not have been the fault of Desborough—faster than any horse in the hunt—and as to jumping, why, he had a man on his back who was a sufficient answer to any reflections on that score.

'May I niver be d—d!' exclaimed old Tom, 'if the varmint isn't going straight for the paddock! One would think he was a rale fox, to see the divilment of him. Sure it must be the hounds puts them up to all the villainy. Well, the bigger the lape, the more divarshion.'

Satisfying himself with this view of the matter, old Tom watched with interest the field gradually approaching a large outer paddock, which lay at some distance from the house. It was the ordinary two-railed fence of the colonists, and though fairly stiff, not formidable to any one who intended going.

The hounds slipped quietly under the lower rail, and in another moment were racing, unchecked, along the flat which it enclosed. But with the field, this obstacle commenced to alter the state of matters.

The first flight, it is true, came rattling round a point of timber at any number of miles an hour, when they encountered this obstacle, to the sardonic entertainment of Tom Glendinning, who had eased his horse to see the effect. Wilfred and Miss Fane were still leading when the line of fence suddenly appeared. Wilfred, from his knowledge of the

country, was aware that it was coming, and had prepared his companion for it.

'It is not very high,' she said. 'We are going so charmingly that I could not bear to be stopped. Emigrant here'—and she fondly patted the dark brown neck of the adamantine animal she rode—'is good for anything in a moderate way.'

'It is scarcely four feet,' said Wilfred, 'but don't go at it if you are not quite sure. We can go round.'

'I'm not going round, I can promise you,' said the girl, with a clear light glowing in her steadfast eyes. 'Oh, here it is. Two-railed fences are not much. Besides, we are leading, and must show a good example.'

Whereupon Emigrant's head was turned towards the nearest panel. The well-bred horses quickened their speed slightly; Emigrant shook his arched neck as both cleared the rail with little more trouble than a sheep-hurdle. As they alighted on the sound greensward, Miss Fane was sitting perfectly square with her hands down, just a little backward in her seat, but without the slightest sign of haste or discomposure.

'Well done,' said Wilfred. 'Prettily jumped. Emigrant has been at it before.'

'He has been at most things,' said Miss Fane, looking fondly at her experienced palfrey. 'He had all kinds of work before I managed to make private property of him; but nobody rides him but me now, and I think I shall manage to keep his old legs right for years to come.'

The next advancing pairs were not quite so secure of their horses' abilities, and a slight uncertainty took place. It was all very well for Miss Fane to say the fence was not much; but rails are rails. When they happen to be new and unyielding, though scarcely four feet in height, a mistake causes a severe fall. There is no *scrambling* through an Australian fence, as a rule. It must be jumped clean or let alone.

Fergus, the unapproachable, was in good sooth no great performer over anything stiff. Peerless as a hackney in all other respects, he was not up to much across country; nor had he been required hitherto, in the houndless state of the land, to do aught in that line. Nevertheless, Rosamond, fired by the example of Miss Fane, and inspirited by the apparent ease with which Emigrant negotiated the obstacle,

would have doubtless run the risk, trusting to Fergus's gentlemanlike feeling to see her safe. But all risk of danger was obviated by Bob Clarke's promptitude.

That chivalrous youth, knowing all about Red King, as indeed he did about every horse in the land, was aware that he was a difficult horse to ride at timber. 'Handsome as paint,' was the general verdict, but he needed two pairs of hands in company.

On this occasion the fact of there being other ambitious animals in front, and the 'great club of the unsuccessful' in his rear, had roused his temper.

The fair Christabel was by no means deficient in courage, but to-day Red King had been too much for her. He had fretted himself into foam, and her pretty hands were sore with holding the 'reefing' horse, whose mouth became more and more callous.

'Don't you ride him at that fence, Miss Christabel,' said Bob, in a tone of entreaty. 'He'll go through it as sure as you're alive. I know him.'

The girl's face grew a shade paler, but she set her teeth, and, pointing with her whip to Miss Fane, who was sailing away in ease and luxury on the farther side, said, 'I *must*; they're all going at it.'

'Very well,' said he—mentally reprobating Red King's mouth and temper, and it may be the obstinacy of young women—'keep behind me, and we'll be next.'

Upon this the wily Bob shot out from the leading ranks, closely followed by the wilful Christabel, whose horse, indeed, left her no option. Sending Desborough at a hog-backed rail at the rate of forty miles an hour, with a reprehensibly loose rein, that indignant animal declined to rise, and, chesting the rail, snapped it like a reed. As Master Bob lay back in the saddle with his head nearly on his horse's tail, he had the pleasure of seeing Christabel pop pleasantly over the second rail, followed by the other ladies, excepting Mrs. Snowden, who faced the unbroken fence with considerable resolution. As for the attendant cavaliers, they negotiated it pleasantly enough, with the exception of a baulk or two and one fall. Indeed, another rail gave way soon after, making a gap through which the rear-guard, variously mounted and attired, streamed gallantly.

As for Bob Clarke, Red King had managed to run up to Desborough—(great turn of speed that old King)—and he fancied he saw in the marvellous eyes a recognition of his unusual mode of easing a stiff leap.

The next happened to be one rare in Australia, having its origin in Mr. Effingham's British reminiscences. A fence was needed in the track of a marshy inlet from the lake. A ditch with a sod wall thrown up on the farther side made a boundary sufficing for all the needs of an enclosure, yet requiring no carriage of material.

'We need not make it quite so broad or deep,' he said, 'as the ox fences in Westmeath; but if I can get a couple of hedgers and ditchers, I shall leave my memorial here, to outlast Dick's timber skeletons.'

Two wandering navvies, on the look-out for dam-making, were fortunately discovered. The result of their labours was 'The Squire's Ditch,' as the unusual substitute was henceforth named. It certainly was a relief after the austerity of posts and rails proper. In a few places the ditch had been filled in and a partial gap made in the sod wall. At any rate horse and rider would all go at it with light hearts. So, with the exception of Wilfred and Miss Fane—the latter having picked out the worst place she could see—everybody treated themselves indulgently; hit the wall, or scrambled over the ditch, just as their horses chose to comport themselves, and rode forward rejoicing.

The hounds have now lengthened out, while their leaders are racing, with lowered sterns, at a pace that leaves the heavy brigade an increasing distance behind. The flat is broken only by an occasional sedgy interval where the fall to the lake has not been sufficient. For the same reason the creek, or natural outlet of the watershed, is, though not very wide, less unequal as to depth than are most Australian watercourses, while the perpendicular banks show how the winter rains of ages have channelled the rich black soil.

'We have something like a water-jump here,' said Wilfred to his companion, as they watched the hounds disappear and climb up, giving tongue as they scour forward with renewed energy. 'It is not so very wide, but the sides are steep. If your horse does not know that sort of jump, we had better follow it down to the ford, near the lake.'

'Black Mountain is full of small rivers and treacheries of all sorts,' said the girl. 'A horse that can go there can go anywhere, I *think*.' Sending Emigrant at it pretty fast, he lowered his head slightly and 'flew it like a bird.'

By the time they approached the Deep Creek, as old Tom averred it had been christened ever since he knew Warbrok, the greater part of the field seemed aware that no common obstacle was before them.

'See here now, Mr. Churbett,' said old Tom. 'It's an ugly lape unless you know where to take it, and some of the ladies might get hurted. You make for the point half a mile down, where ye see thim green reeds. There's a little swamp fills it up there, and ye can wade through easy. More by token, I'm thinkin', the hounds will turn to ye before ye cross the three-railed fence into the horse paddock.'

Mr. Churbett at once made sail for the point indicated, successfully piloting, with Forbes and a few men who were more chivalrous than keen, the feminine division. He was followed by the greater portion of the rear-guard, who, seeing that there was an obstacle to free discussion in front, wisely turned when they did. Hamilton, Argyll, and Hampden rode at the yawner with varied success.

As for Bob Clarke, seeing that it was impossible to adopt his last method of simplifying matters, he persuaded Miss Rockley to gallop up the creek with him, on the off-chance of finding a crossing, which they did eventually, but so far up that they were nearly thrown out altogether.

We cannot claim for the sheep-killing denizen of the Australian waste, mysteriously placed on our continent a century in advance of the merino, the wondrous powers of Reynard the Great. But in the pace which enables him to bring to shame an inferior greyhound, and in the endurance which keeps him ahead of a fair pack of foxhounds, as well as in his ardent love of poultry, he undoubtedly does resemble 'the little tyrant of the fields.'

The distance the black dingo had already come was considerable, the pace decidedly good. The long slopes, all with an upward tendency, began to tell. When the fence of the home-paddock was reached, the farther corner of which impinged upon a steep spur of the main range, the bolt of the gallant quarry was nearly shot.

He was viewed by Tom crawling under the lower rail; an enthusiastic view-holloa rang out from the old man. One more fence and a kill was certain, unless his last effort sufficed to land him within reach of one of the 'gibbah-gunyahs' (or rock caves) which the aboriginals and their canine friends had inhabited apparently from remote ages.

As the field ranged up to the horse-paddock fence, it was seen to be by no means so moderate a task as the other post and rails. Old Dick, who had superintended its erection, had been careful that it should be one of the best pieces of work in the district,—substantial, of full height, and with solid posts nearly two feet in the ground. Hence it loomed before the hunt fully four feet six inches in height, with top-rails which forbade all chance of cracking or carrying out.

Fortunately for the ladies and a large proportion of the sterner sex, who would have to 'jump or go home,' Wilfred knew of 'slip-rails' a little more than a hundred yards from where the quick eyes of old Tom had marked the dingo steal through.

'I have no doubt you would try it, Miss Fane,' said Wilfred, who marked with admiration the game sparkle in his companion's eye, as her gaze ranged calmly over the barrier; 'but it is a high, stiff fence, and dangerous for a lady. At any rate, as your temporary guardian, I must forbid your taking it, if you would defer to my control.'

'Certainly, oh, certainly, and many thanks,' said the girl, blushing slightly; 'it is very good of you to take care of me. But what are we to do? We *can't* miss the finish after this delightful run.'

'Certainly not. Do you see the road to the right of us? There is a slip-rail on the track, which I fancy will be patronised. Follow me.'

Slip-rails are contemned by advanced pastoralists, but they stood the Lake William Hunt in good stead on this occasion. As they rode to the opening, Miss Fane said:

'Pray leave the middle rail up. It will be the last jump, and I daresay the other ladies will agree with me.'

'Very well,' said Wilfred. 'I need not get off.'

Riding up to the fence, he lifted out the shifting end of the stout round rail, and, allowing it to fall to the ground, cantered back to his fair companion.

'Now then,' she said, 'see how prettily you will take this, Master Emigrant! It is quite stiff, though not very high.'

In truth the rail, as high as a sheep-hurdle, was slightly hog-backed, and strong enough to have capsized a buffalo.

'You will go first, of course,' said Wilfred, turning his horse's head in the same direction.

The nice old hackney, albeit his best years had been spent as a stock-horse amid the unfair country of the Black Mountain run, was within a shade of thoroughbred. He went at the jump with his hind legs well under him, and, rising at exactly the proper moment, popped over with so little effort or disturbance of seat that Miss Fane might have held a glass of water in her whip-hand.

If she had turned her head she might not have been so self-possessed; for, the moment her back was turned, Wilfred Effingham, foreseeing that the talent would be sure to ride this, the only sensational fence of the run, turned his horse's head to the big three-railer.

He rode an upstanding chestnut five-year-old, which he had selected as a colt from the Benmohr stud. For some time past he had employed himself in 'making' him, a pleasant task to a lover of horses. He had given the resolute youngster much schooling over logs, rails, and any kind of fence which came handy, avoiding those which were not unyielding. He was aware that no more dangerous idea can be contracted by a timber-jumper, than that he can break through anything, the first new fence that he meets being likely fatally to undeceive him. He flattered himself that Troubadour, from repeated raps, would take care to rise high enough over any fence.

At the moment he set him going he saw Argyll and Churbett, with Hampden, St. Maur, and all the 'no denial' division converging on the slip-rails, having witnessed Miss Fane's disappearance through them.

Whether Troubadour was over-anxious to regain Emigrant, cannot be known. But he went at the fence too fast, hit the top-rail a tremendous bang, and rolled over into the paddock, narrowly escaping a somersault across his master.

He, however, was lucky enough to be thrown, by the mere impetus of the fall, clear of his horse. Jumping to his feet with the alacrity of youth, he caught the bridle-rein of the

astonished Troubadour, who stood staring and shaking, just in time to see The Caliph sail over the high fence with a great air of ease and authority, followed by the others, among whom Churbett's horse hit the fence hard, 'but no fall.' The ladies followed Miss Fane's example and negotiated the middle rail successfully, as Wilfred jumped into his saddle, and sending his spurs into the unlucky Troubadour, rejoined his charge without further delay.

That young lady had pulled up, and was looking at the scene of the disaster with an anxious expression. Her face had assumed a paler hue, and her hands fidgeted with the bridle-rein.

'I am *so* glad you are not hurt,' she said. 'I thought all sorts of things till I saw you get up and mount.'

'Thank you very much,' said Wilfred, with a grateful inflection in his voice. 'It was very awkward of Troubadour; but accidents will happen, and it will teach him to lift his legs another time. But we must ride for it now; we have been in the front so far. Ha! the hounds are turning to us; they will have Master Dingo before he reaches the cliffs.'

Another mile and the dark quadruped, still at a stretching wolf-gallop, was decidedly nearer the leading hounds, whose bristles began to rise, ominous of blood. Old Tom, waving his cap, cheered them on as he rode rejoicingly forward on the wiry, unflinching grey. Slower and more laboured became the pace of the aboriginal canine. Before him was the cliff, upon the lower tier of which, could he have crawled, lay sanctuary. But in vain he scans eagerly the frowning masses of sandstone, denuded by the storms of ages. In vain he glances fiercely back at the remorseless pack, showing his glittering teeth. His doom is sealed. With a half-turn and a vicious snap, in which his teeth meet like a steel-trap through Cruiser's neck, he confronts destiny. The next moment there is a confused heap of struggling, tearing hounds, a few seconds of dumb, despairing resistance, and the mothers of the herd are avenged.

Miss Fane turns away her head and joins the group of 'first families,' by this time enabled to be in respectably at the death.

Old Tom in due time appeared with the brush of the

dingo, which he held on high for inspection. It was not unlike that of the true Reynard, though larger and fuller. It had also a white tag. The old man, advancing to Miss Fane's side, thus spoke:

'The Masther said I was to give ye the brush, Miss; it's well ye desarve it. Sure I'd like to have seen ye with the Blazers. My kind sarvice to ye, and wishin' ye the hoith of good fortune.'

'Well done, Tom!' said Argyll, 'you have made a very neat speech; and we all congratulate Miss Fane upon her very spirited riding to-day. As you say, she well deserves the brush, and I hope she will grace many more of our meets.'

'We must send the "cap" round for the huntsman, Tom,' said Hampden, 'who found such a straight-goer for the first run of the Lake William Hounds, and hit off the scent so neatly after the check.'

As he spoke he lifted it from the old man's grey head, and placing a sovereign in it, rode along the ranks. He returned it with such a collection of coin as the old man, long accustomed to cheques and 'orders,' had not seen for years.

'It's fortunate the fox—the dingo, I mean,' said Wilfred, 'chose to make for the cliffs, instead of the other end of the lake. We should have had a terrible distance to ride home, though not in the dark, as one often was in the old country. Now, you must all come in, as we are so near The Chase. We can put up everybody who hasn't pressing work to do at home.'

The day was done. The hunt was over, with the first pack of hounds that had ever been followed amid the green pastures which bordered the Great Lake. It was by no means the last. And indeed a hunter, bred and broken by one of the very men who then aided to establish that traditional sport, was fated, when shipped to England, to be one of the few well up in the quickest thing that the Pytchley saw that season, to be chronicled in Bell, and to win enduring renown for Australian horses and Australian riders. But that day, with much of Fate's glad or sorrowful doings, was far in the unborn future. So the band of friends and neighbours returned to The Chase, pleased with

themselves, with the day, and the feats performed, and above all, congratulating Squire Effingham upon the triumphant opening meet of the season.

Not all the meets were so well attended. But the grand fact remained that, at regular intervals, dawn saw the dappled beauties trooping forth at the heels of old Tom and the Master across the dewy meadows, beneath the century-old trees of the primeval forest. Still rang out the music, dear to Howard Effingham's soul, when the scent lay well in the soft, cloudy, autumnal mornings. Still were there, occasionally, incidents of hunting spirit and feats of horsemanship worthy of the traditional glories of the ne'er-forgotten Fatherland.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAJOR DISCOVERS HIS RELATIVE

After the inauguration, hunting became an organised and well-supported recreation among the dwellers within the influence of the social wavelets of the lake. The Benmohr firm found, on the whole—though the stabling of hunters was not unaccompanied by expense—that it brought their stud prominently before the public. Hence they found ready sale, at an ascending scale of prices, for all the colts they could turn out. Strangers came for the hunting, and made purchases. The hounds, too, meeting regularly once a week during the winter months, exercised a repressive influence upon the dingos, so much so, that M.F.H. (not being a sheep-owner) began seriously to think of preserving these much-maligned yet indispensable animals.

So widely spread and honourably mentioned was the fame of the Lake William Hunt Club, that His Vice-regal Highness the Governor himself more than once deigned to partake of the hospitality of The Chase, bringing with him aides-de-camp and private secretaries, pleasant of manner, and refreshing as such to the souls of the daughters of the house.

Meanwhile Wilfred worked away at the serious business of the estate, only taking occasional interest in these extraneous pleasures; grumbling, moreover, at the expense, indirect or otherwise, that the kennel necessitated.

However, it must be said in justice to him, that it was rarely he was betrayed into impatience with regard to an occupation which, with other branches of acclimatised field sports, had become the mainstay of his father's interest in life.

'Really,' Mr. Effingham would say, 'in a few years—say about eighteen hundred and forty-five or thereabouts — I believe we shall be nearly as secure of decent sport as we were in old England. The Murray cod are increasing in the lake. I have brown trout, dace, and tench in the little river. There are almost too many rabbits; and as to hares, pheasants, and partridges, we can invite half-a-dozen guns next season, without fear of consequences. I have been offered deer from Tasmania. With the inducement of a stag-hunt and a haunch of venison, I don't see why we shouldn't finish our season right royally. Depend upon it, New South Wales only wants enterprise, in the department of field sports, to become one of the finest countries under the sun.'

There was no doubt that in the eyes of an observer not endowed with the apprehensive temperament which numbers so many successful men amongst its possessors, the appearance of matters generally at The Chase justified reasonable outlay.

Wilfred had made a few guarded investments—all successful so far. What, for instance, could pay better than the purchase of the quiet, dairy steers from the small farmers in the autumn, when grass and cash were scarce, to fatten them in the lake paddocks? Adjacent freeholds, from time to time in the market, were added to the snug estate of The Chase. True, he could not always find the cash at call for these tempting bargains—(is there anything so enticing as the desire to add farm to farm and house to house, as in the old, old days of Judah?)—but Mr. Rockley was ready to endorse his bill, which, with his credit at the Bank of New Holland, was as good as cash.

Thus passed the time until the close of the hunting season, before which Major Glendinning had returned and apparently taken up his abode in the neighbourhood, in great request at all the stations, and earning for himself daily the character of a thorough sportsman. He purchased a couple of horses from the Benmohr stud, on which, from time to time, he performed such feats across country as caused it to be surmised that, in the event of his settling in the neighbourhood, Bob Clarke would find a rival.

He spoke highly of the standard as to blood and bone of

the horses bred in the district, openly stating that, in the event of the proprietors being minded to establish a system of shipment to India, they might expect extraordinary prices for their best horses, while the medium ones would be worth double or treble their colonial value.

Mr. Rockley, after reckoning up expenses, together with the rather serious item of risk of loss on ship-board, decided that there was a handsome margin. He finished by declaring that in the following spring, which would be in time for the cool season at Calcutta, he would send a dozen horses of his own breeding, and join them in a cargo from the district.

The idea was adopted. Preparations were made by handling and stable-feeding as many of the saleable horses as could be spared. O'Desmond was a warm supporter of the movement. He offered to find from his long-established stud fully half the number necessary for the undertaking. The Major, who was compelled to revisit India once more, if but for the last time, had agreed to accompany the emigrants, and to see them safely into the stables of old Sheik Mahommed, the great Arab horse-dealer.

'Fancy getting a hundred or two for our colts!' said Hamilton. 'Not more than they are worth when you come to think of their breeding. I look upon the Camerton stock as the very best horses in New South Wales, probably in Australia. But of course we never expect more than a third of such prices in these markets.'

'The Major deserves a statue,' said Argyll, 'inscribed—"Ad centurionem fortissimum, qui, equis canibusque gaudens, primus in Indis et in Nova Cambria erat."'

'Very neat and classical,' affirmed Fred Churbett. 'I intend to send Duellist. I should be sure to get three hundred for him, shouldn't I? He's a sweet hack, but the price *is* tempting. I daresay I could pick up another one up to my weight.'

'A horse of Duellist's blood, size, and fashion would sell for that sum any day in Calcutta,' assented the Major. 'He would be a remarkable horse anywhere, and I need not tell you, would fetch more as a park hack in London.'

'Would we were both there!' murmured Fred softly. 'I fancy I see myself on him doing Rotten Row. I have half a

mind to go with you to Calcutta, Major. If the trade develops we might make money a little faster than at present, and have our fling in the old country before these locks are tinged with grey,' melodramatically patting his auburn *chevelure*.

'It might be a desirable change,' said Forbes. 'Many people are said to improve in appearance as they grow older.'

'But not in mildness of disposition, James,' retorted Churbett. 'A tendency to flat contradiction and aggressive argument has rarely been known to abate with advancing years. But this is wide of the Indian Remount Association. I don't see why we shouldn't offer to ship and sell on commission. Many people in the district breed a good nag and don't know what to do with him afterwards. Suppose we consult the Squire about it. He's not a business man, but he knows India well.'

It was agreed that they should make up a party, consisting of Forbes, Churbett, the Major, and Argyll, to ride over to The Chase that afternoon. This was always a popular proceeding if any colour of business, news, or sport could be discovered for the visit.

As they were nearing the gate of the home-paddock, they encountered Wilfred Effingham, accompanied by his old stock-rider, bringing in a draft of cattle. They amused themselves watching the efficient aid rendered by the dog, and remarked incidentally the fiery impatience and clever horsemanship of old Tom, who, roused by the difficulty of driving some of the outlying younger cattle, was flying round the drove upon old Boney at a terrific pace.

'How well that old vagabond rides!' said Fred Churbett, as Tom came racing down the range after a perverse heifer, forcing her along at the very top of her speed, with Boney's opened mouth just at her quarter, at which, with ears laid back and menacing teeth, he reached over from time to time, the old man's whip meanwhile rattling over her in a succession of pistol-cracks, while he audibly devoted her to the infernal deities.

'There, thin, may the divil take ye for a cross-grained, contrairy, brindle-hided baste of a scrubber; may I niver if I don't have ye in the cask the first time yer bones is dacently covered!' he wrathfully ejaculated, as Boney stopped dead at

the rear of the drove, into which the alarmed heifer shot with the velocity of a shell.

As they rode up to Wilfred and his man, Major Glendinning addressed the old stock-rider:

'By the way, Tom, do you happen to know any one of your own name in this part of the country—or elsewhere in the colony, as you have been such a traveller?'

'The divil a know I know,' replied Tom (who was in one of his worst humours, and at such times had little control over himself), 'of any man but Parson Glendinning that lives on the Hunter River, and he's a Scotchman and never seen "the black North" at all. But what raison have ye to ask *me?* I'm Tom Stewart Glendinning, the stock-rider, and barrin' that I was "lagged" and was a fool to myself all my life long, I've no call to be ashamed of my name, more than another man.'

As he spoke the old man raised himself in his saddle and looked steadily, even fiercely, into the eyes of his interlocutor, who in turn, half astonished, half irritated at the old man's manner, frowned as he returned the gaze with military sternness of rebuke.

Wilfred came up with the intention of rating his follower for his acerbity, but as he marked the fixed expression of the two men, something prevented him interposing. A similar feeling took possession of the others, as they stopped speaking and unconsciously constituted themselves an audience during this peculiar colloquy. Did a shadow of doubt, a half-acknowledged idea cross the minds of the spectators, as they watched the two men whose paths in life lay so wide apart? Was it the fire which burned with sudden glow, at that moment, in the eyes of both speakers, as they confronted each other, the chance similarity of their aquiline features, closely compressd lips, and knitted brows? Whatever the unseen influence, it was simultaneous, as it awed to silence men, at no time easy to control, and placed them in a position of mesmeric domination.

The Major rapidly, but with strangely husky intonation, then said:

'Under that name did you send to Simon Glendinning, in the county of Derry, certain sums of money?'

'I did thin; and why wouldn't I, if it was my own? It

was asy made in thim days; the country was worth living in, —not like now, overstocked with "jimmies" and foreign trash.'

'You sent that money, as I was informed,' continued the Major, persistently unheeding the old man's petulance, 'for the benefit of a child, a nephew of your own, whom you desired to provide for?'

'Nephew be hanged! The boy was *my son*, Owen Walter Glendinning by name. Maybe he's dead and gone this many a day, for I niver heard tale or tidings of him since. It's as well for him and betther. 'Tis little use I see in draggin' on life in this world at all, unless you've great luck intirely. But what call have ye to be cross-examinin' me—like a lawyer—about my family affairs, and what makes the colour lave yer face like a dead man's? Who are ye at all?'

'I am Owen Walter Glendinning! It was for me that your money was used. I am—your—son!'

As he spoke an ashen hue overspread the bronzed cheek, and the strong man swayed in his saddle as if he would have fallen to the ground. His lips were clenched, and every feature bore the impress of the agony that strains nature's every capacity. As for the spectators, they looked upon the actors in this life drama, of which the catastrophe had been so unexpectedly sprung upon them, with silent respect accorded to those beyond human aid. Words would have been worse than useless. They could but look, but sit motionless on their horses, but school every feature to passive recipiency, until the end should come.

'God in Heaven!' cried the old man; 'do you tell me so? May the tongue be blistered that spoke the word! It was a lie I tould you—lies—lies—I tell ye; sure ye don't belave a word of it?'

Then he looked at the despairing face of the soldier with wistful entreaty and bitter regret, piteous to behold.

'It is too late; it is useless to declare that you misled me. You have betrayed the truth, which in pity for my unworthy pride you attempt to conceal.'

'It's all a lie—a lie—a hellish lie!' screamed the old man, transported with rage and regret. 'What you, my son! You! Major Glendinning, a fine gintleman, and a soldier every inch of ye, the ayquals of the best gintry in the land and they proud of ye, the son of a drunken old convict

stock-rider! I tell ye it *can't* be. I swear it's a lie. I knew the man ye spake of. He's dead now, but he was book-larned and come of an old family. I heard tell of his sending home money to his nephew in the North, and our names being the same I just said it out of divilment. Sure I'd cut my throat if I thought I'd be the manes of harmin' ye. Why don't ye curse me? Why don't ye tell thim gintlemen I'm a lyin' old villain? They know me well. Here, I'll swear on my bended knees, by the blessed Virgin and all the saints, there's no word of truth in what I said.'

As old Tom raved, implored, and blasphemed, cursing at once his own folly and evil hap, his face writhed with the working of inward feeling. His features were deadly pale, well-nigh livid; the tears ran down his furrowed cheeks, while his eyes blazed with an unearthly light. As he fell on his knees and commenced his oath of renunciation the calm tones of the Major were again heard.

'All this is vain and useless. Get up, and listen to reason. That you are my—my father, I have now not the slightest reason to doubt. Your knowledge of the name, of the annual sum sent, is sufficient evidence; if these facts were not ample, the resemblance of feature is to me at this moment, as doubtless to our good friends here, unmistakable. Fate has brought about this meeting, why, I dare not question. You are too excited to listen now'—here the old man made as though he would burst in with a torrent of imprecations on the childish absurdity of the speaker —'but we shall meet again before I leave for India.'

'May we niver meet again on God's earth! 'Tis yerself that's to blame if this divil's blast gets out. Sure the Benmohr gintlemen and Mr. Churbett won't let on. Mr. Wilfred's close enough. Kape your saycret, and divil a soul need hear of the sell ould Tom gave ye. My sarvice to ye, Major!'

Here the old man mounted and devoted his energies to the cattle. Wilfred moved forward, by no means sorry that the strange scene had concluded.

'Look here, Effingham, I will ride on to The Chase and make my adieus; as well now as another time. I return at once to India. You understand my position, I feel sure.'

He rode forward with a more upright seat, a firmer hand

upon his bridle-rein, and that stern lighting of the eyes that may be seen when, and when only—

> Bridle-reins are gathered up,
> And sabres blaze on high,

ere each man spurs to the death feast, wherein his own name has, perchance, been sounded on a shadowy roll-call by a phantom herald.

Hamilton urged his horse alongside of the Major and held out his hand. Their eyes met as each wrung the proffered palm. But no word was spoken. Argyll and Churbett rode slightly ahead. Before long they reached the gate of The Chase, which, with its peculiar fastening, their horses began to know pretty well, either sidling steadily up or commencing to gambade at the very sight of it, in token of detestation, as did Grey Surrey.

'It seems odd that I shall perhaps never see this house again,' said Major Glendinning, slowly and reflectively. 'I was beginning to be very fond of it, and had made up my mind to buy a place for a stud farm and settle near it. But why think of it now, or of anything else? "What is decreed by Allah is decreed," as saith the Moslem. Who am I to complain of the universal fate?'

But as the strong man spoke there was an involuntary tremor in his voice, a contraction of the muscles, as when the dumb, tortured frame quivers under the surgeon's knife.

'Oh, how glad I am that you all came to-day,' said Annabel, as they walked in; 'that is, if a girl is permitted to express her pleasure at the arrival of gentlemen. Perhaps I should have said "how fortunate a coincidence." But, as a fact, all our horses are in to-day, and we were just wondering if we could make up a riding-party after lunch. Mr. Churbett, I can order you to come, because you never have any work to do; not like some tiresome people who *will* go home late at night or early in the morning.'

'I never get credit for my labours, Miss Annabel. I'm too good-natured and easily intimidated—by ladies. But did you never hear of my memorable journey with cattle from Gundagai to the coast, all in the depth of winter; and —and—in fact—several other exploring enterprises?'

'What, really, Mr. Churbett? Then I recant. But I

thought you managed the station from your verandah, sitting in a large cane chair, with a pile of books on the floor.'

'An enemy hath done this,' said Mr. Churbett impressively. 'Miss Annabel, I never shall be exonerated till you immortalise The She-oaks with your presence at a muster. Then, and then only, can you dimly shadow forth the deeds that the knight Frederico Churbetto, with his good steed Grey Surrey, is capable of achieving.'

'"I wadna doot," as Andrew says; and indeed, Mr. Churbett, I should like very much to see all the galloping and watch you and your stock-riders at work. You must ask mamma. Only, the present question is, can we have a canter down to the lake side?'

'We shall be truly thankful,' said Hamilton. 'I can answer for it. We did not know the good fortune in store for us when we started.'

'Oh, thanks, thanks! Consider everything nice said on both sides. But what have you done to Major Glendinning? He looks so serious.'

'Oh, he's all right,' said Hamilton, thinking it best to suffer their friend to make his explanations personally. 'Indian warriors, you know, are apt to suffer from old wounds. Change of weather, I think.'

'Poor fellow!' said Annabel. 'It seems hard that if one is not killed in battle, he should have to suffer afterwards. However, we must cheer him up. I will go and put my habit on.'

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The afternoon was fine, so after a preliminary saddling-up, the whole party filed off, apparently in high spirits. The roads in one direction were always sound, while by ascending slightly one of the spurs of the range a grand view was always obtainable.

Rosamond rode foremost, as she generally did, by right of the exceptional walking of Fergus. She was accompanied by Forbes, whose hackney had been selected after great research, his friends averred, in order that he might rank as the next fastest pacer in those parts. Argyll and Wilfred brought up the rear, occasionally joining company with Annabel and Fred Churbett. The Major and Beatrice went next behind the leaders. The couples preserved the order in which they

set out, with the exception of the inroad upon Fred and Annabel's eager colloquies, which were not deeply sentimental. That amiable personage complained that no one scrupled to break in upon his *tête-à-têtes*. He 'thought he should have to grow a moustache and call some one out, in order to inspire respect.'

Major Glendinning had made frequent visits to Warbrok, and familiar intercourse having naturally resulted from his intimacy with their friends at Benmohr, the family had come to look upon him as one of their particular set. Of a nature constitutionally reserved, and more specially self-contained from long residence as a military autocrat in one of the provinces of Northern India, he had read and thought more deeply than men of his class are apt to do. In proportion, therefore, to his general reticence was his satisfaction in unlocking his stores of experience when he met with congenial minds.

A few chance questions on the part of Beatrice Effingham, after his first introduction to the family, had discovered to him that she was better informed as to the administration of Northern India than most people. Hence grew up between them a common ground of interest in which he could expatiate and explain. And his listener was never tired of hearing from an eye-witness and an actor the true story of the splendours and tragedies of that historic land.

The real reason of this research, apart from the hunger for literary pabulum, which at all times possessed Beatrice, was an affectionate interest in the life of an uncle, who, after entering upon a brilliant career, had perished through the treachery of a native Rajah. His adventures had fascinated the romantic girl from early childhood; hence she had loved to verify every detail of the circumstances under which the star of the ill-fated Raymond Effingham had faded into darkness.

By those indescribable degrees of advance, of which the heart can note the progress, but rarely the first approach, a friendship between the Major and the thoughtful girl became so apparent as to be the subject of jesting remark. When, therefore, he had announced his intention of settling in the neighbourhood, a thrill of unusual force invaded the

calm pulses of Beatrice Effingham. Had his retirement from the service, from the profession he loved so well, some reason in which her future was concerned? If so, if he settled down on one of the adjoining properties, could any union be more consonant with her every feeling, taste, and aspirations than with one whom, in every way, she could so fully respect and admire, whose deeds in that wonderland of her fancies were written on the records of his country's fame? It was a dream too bright for reality. And though it would occasionally disturb the even tenor of Beatrice's hours in the library, her well-regulated mind refused to dwell upon possibilities as yet unsanctioned.

When, therefore, Major Glendinning promptly availed himself of the opportunity afforded by the ride to the lake to constitute himself her escort; when, after a few commonplace observations, she observed that his countenance, though more grave than was usual in her presence, had yet an expression of fixed resolve, an indefinable feeling of expectation, almost amounting to dread, took possession of her, and it was with a beating heart and changing cheek that she listened.

'I take advantage of this opportunity, Miss Beatrice, to say the words which must be said before we part.'

'Part!' said the girl, shaking in every limb, though she bravely struggled against her emotions and tried to impart firmness to her voice. 'Then you are going to leave us for India? Have you been ordered back suddenly?'

'That is as it may be,' said the soldier; and as he spoke their eyes met. His face wore a look of unalterable decision, yet so fraught was it with misery, even despair, that she instinctively felt that Fate had dealt her a remorseless stroke. 'I have heard this day,' he continued, 'what has altered the chief purpose of my life—has killed my every hope. I return to India by the next ship.'

'You have heard terribly bad news,' she answered very softly. 'I see it in your face I need not tell you how we shall all sympathise with you; how grieved we shall be at your departure.'

Here the womanly instinct of the consoler proved stronger than that of the much-vaunted ruler of courts and camps, inasmuch as Beatrice lost sight of her personal feelings in bethinking herself how she could aid the strong man,

whose features bore evidence of the agony which racked every nerve and fibre.

'I feel deeply grateful for your sympathy. I knew you would bestow it. No living man needs it more. This morning I rode out fuller of pleasant anticipation than I can recall, prepared to take a step which I hoped would result in my life's happiness. I had arranged for an extension of leave, after which I intended to sell out and live in this neighbourhood, which for many reasons—for every reason—I have found so delightful.'

'And your plans are altered?'

This query was made in tones studiously free from all trace of interest or disapproval, although the beating heart and throbbing brain of the girl almost prevented utterance.

'I have this day—this day only—you will do me the justice hereafter to believe—heard a statement, unhappily too true, which clears up the mystery which has rested upon me from my birth. That cloud has been removed. But behind it lies a foul blot, a dark shadow of dishonour, which I deemed could never have rested on the name of Walter Glendinning.'

'Dishonour!' echoed Beatrice. 'Impossible! How can that be?'

'It is as I say—deep and ineradicable,' groaned out the unhappy man. 'You will hear more from your brother. All is known to him and your friends of Benmohr. Enough that I have no personal responsibility. But it is a burden that I must carry till the day of a soldier's death. You will believe me when I say that my honour demands that I quit Australia—to me so dear, yet so fatal. The years that may remain to me belong to my country.'

'I feel,' said the girl, with kindling eye and a pride of bearing which equalled his own, 'that you are doing what your high sense of honour, of duty, demands. I can but counsel you to take them, for guide and inspiration. I know not the doom which has fallen on you, but I can bid you God-speed, and pray for you evermore.'

'You have spoken my inmost thoughts. God help us that it should be so. But I were disloyal to every thought and aspiration of my nature if I stooped to link the life of another, as God is my witness and judge, to my tarnished

name. We must part—never, perhaps, to meet on earth—but, Beatrice, dearest and only loved—may I not call you so? —I who now look upon your face, and hear your voice for the last time—you will think in your happy home of one who tore the heart from his bosom, which a dark fate forbade him to offer you. When you hear that Walter Glendinning died a soldier's death, give a tear to his memory—to his fate who scorned death, but could not endure dishonour.'

Neither spoke for some moments. The girl's tears flowed fast as she gazed before her, while both rode steadily onward. The man's form was bowed, and his set features wore the livid aspect of him who has received a death-wound but strives to hide the inward agony. Slowly, mechanically, they rode side by side along the homeward track, in the rear of the others until the entrance gate was reached. Then, as if by mutual impulse, they turned towards each other, and their eyes met in one long sorrowful glance. Such light has shone in the eyes of those who parted ere now, sanctified by a martyr's hope—a martyr's death.

'We shall meet,' she said, 'no more on earth; but oh, if you value my love, cherish the thought of a higher life—of a better world, where no false human pride, no barrier of man's cruelty or injustice may sever us. I hold the trust which my heart, if not my lips, confessed. Till then, farewell, and may a merciful God keep our lives unstained until the day of His coming.'

She drew the glove from her hand hurriedly. It fell at his horse's feet. He dismounted hastily, and placed it in his bosom, and raising her ice-cold hand to his lips, pressed it with fervour. Then accompanying her to the hall door, he committed her to the charge of Wilfred, who, with his mother and sister, stood on the verandah, took a hurried leave of the family, regretting that he was compelled, by sudden summons, to rejoin his regiment, and with his friends, who with ready tact made excuse for returning, took the familiar track to Benmohr.

Few words were spoken on the homeward road, which was traversed at a pace that tried the mettle of the descendants of Camerton. That night the friends sat late, talking earnestly. It was long after midnight before they separated. On the following day Major Glendinning and his father met

at a spot half-way between The Chase and Benmohr, the interview being arranged by Hamilton, who rode over and persuaded the old man to accompany him. What passed between them was never known, but ere that night was ended the Major was far on his way to Sydney, which he reached in time to secure a passage in the good ship *Governor Bourke*, outward bound for China. In the course of the week Mr. Effingham received a letter in explanation of the circumstances, signed Owen Walter Glendinning, declaring his unworthiness to aspire to his daughter's hand, as well as his inability to remain in the country after the mystery of his birth had been so unexpectedly revealed to him. He held himself pledged to act in the matter after the expiration of a year in accordance with what Mr. Effingham, acting as the guardian of his daughter's happiness, might consider in the light of an honourable obligation. A bank draft drawn in favour of Thomas Stewart Glendinning was enclosed, with an intimation that an annual payment would be forwarded for his use henceforth during the writer's life.

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The first cloud which the Effinghams had descried since their arrival in Australia had appeared in the undimmed horizon. The breath of evil, which knows no bound nor space beneath the sun, had rested on them. Habitually taking deeper interest in the subjective issues of life than in its material transaction, they were proportionately depressed. All that maternal love and the most tender sisterly affection could give was lavished upon the sufferer. Her well-disciplined mind, strengthened by culture and purified by religion, gradually acquired equilibrium. But it was long ere the tranquil features of Beatrice Effingham recovered their wonted expression; and a close observer could have detected the trace of an inward woe in the depths of her erstwhile clear, untroubled eyes.

In his answer to the letter which he had received, Mr. Effingham 'fully agreed with the course which his friend had taken, and the determination which he had expressed. Looking at the situation, which he deplored with his whole heart, he was unable to see any other mode of action open to him as a man of honour. Deeply prejudicial as had been the issue to the happiness of his beloved daughter, he could

not ask him (Major Glendinning) to swerve by one hair's-breadth from the path which he had laid down for himself. His wishes would be attended to with respect to the bank draft forwarded for the use of the person named, but he would suggest that Mr. Sternworth should be chosen as the recipient of future remittances. He would, in conclusion, wish him the fullest measure of success and distinction which his profession offered, with, if not happiness, the inward satisfaction known to those who marched ever in the vanguard of honourable duty. In this wish he was warmly seconded by every member of the family.'

Old Tom, after notice of his intention to leave the employment, presented himself before his master, dressed and accoutred as for a journey, leading Boney and followed by the uncompromising Crab. His effects were fastened in a roll in front of his saddle, his coiled stockwhip was pendent from the side-buckle. All things, even to the fixed look upon the weather-beaten features, betokened a settled resolution.

'I'm going to lave the ould place, Captain,' he said; 'and it's sorry I am this day to quit the family and the lake and the hounds, where I laid it out to lave the ould bones of me. I'm wishin' the divil betther divarshion than to bother with the family saycrets of the likes o' me. Sure he has lashins of work in this counthry, without disturbin' the last days of poor ould Tom Glendinning—and he sure of me, anyhow. My heart's bruk, so it is.'

'Hush, Tom,' said his employer. 'We can understand Major Glendinning's feelings. But, after all, it is his duty to acknowledge the ties of nature. I have no doubt that after a time he will become—er—used to the relationship.'

'D—n the relationship!' burst out the old man menacingly. 'Ah, an' sure I ax yer pardon, yer honour, for the word; but 'tis wild I am that the Major, a soldier and a rale gintleman every inch of him, that's fought for the Queen and skivered them infernal blackamoors in the Injies, should be given out as the son of a blasted ould rapparee like me. It was asy knowing when I seen that look on him when he heard the name, but how could I drame that *my son* could have turned into a king's officer—all as one as the best of the land? If I *had* known it for sartain, before he

axed me, I'd have lived beside him as a common stock-rider for years, if he'd come here, and he's niver have known no more than the dead. It's a burning shame and a sin, that's what it is!'

'It may have been unfortunate,' said Mr. Effingham; 'but I can never regard it as wrong that a father and a son should come to know of the tie which binds them to each other.'

'And why not, I ask ye?' demanded the old man savagely. 'What good has it done aither of us? It's sent *him* back, with a sore heart, to live among them black divils and snakes and tigers, a murdtherin' hot counthry it is by all accounts, when he might have bought a place handy here and bred horses and cattle—sure he's an iligant rider and shoots beautiful, don't he now? I wonder did he take them gifts after me?' said the old man, with the first softened expression and a half sigh. 'Sure, if I could have plazed myself *with lookin' at him* and he not to know, I wouldn't say but that I might have listened to Parson Sternworth and —and—repinted,—yes, repinted,—after all that's come and gone! And now I'm on the ould thrack agin, with tin divils tearin' at me, and who knows what will happen.'

'There's no need for you to lead a wandering life, or indeed, to work at all, even if you leave the district,' said Mr. Effingham. 'I have a sum in my hands, forwarded by the Major, sufficient for all your wants.'

'I'll not touch a pinny of it!' cried out the old man; 'sure it's blood money, no less, his *life*, anyway, that will pay for this! Didn't I see his eye, when he shook hands with me, and begged my pardon for his pride, and asked me to bless him—*me!*'—and here the old man laughed derisively, a sound not pleasant to hear. 'If there's fighting where he's going, and he lives out the year, it will be because lead and cowld steel has no power to harm a man that wants to die. Mr. Effingham, I'll never touch it; and why would I? Sure the drink 'll kill me, fast enough, without help.'

'But why go away? I am so grieved that, after your faithful service, you should leave in such a state of mind.'

'Maybe I'll do ye more sarvice before I die, but I must get into the far-out runs, or I'll go mad thinking of *him*. It was my hellish timper that let the words out so quick, or he'd never have known till his dying day. Maybe the rheumatiz

was to blame, that keeps burning in the bones of me like red-hot iron, till I couldn't spake a civil word to the blessed Saviour Himself. Anyhow, it's done now; but of all I ever did—and there's what would hang me on the list—I repint over *that*, the worst, and will till I die. Good-bye, sir. God bless the house, and thim that's in it.'

The old man remounted his wayworn steed with more agility than his appearance promised, and taking the track which led southward, went slowly along the road without turning his head or making further speech. The dog rose to his feet and trotted after him. In a few moments the characteristic trio passed from sight.

'Mysterious indeed are the ways of Providence!' thought Effingham, as he turned towards the house. 'Who would ever have thought that the fortunes of this strange old man would ever have been associated with me or mine. I feel an unaccountable presentiment, as if this incident, inexplicable as it is, were but the forerunner of evil!'

CHAPTER XIX

BLACK THURSDAY

Autumn and winter passed in the ordinary succession of regular duties and peaceful employments, now become easy and habitual. These the expatriated family had learned to love. The departure of the old stock-rider was felt as a temporary inconvenience, but the brothers with Dick Evans's aid and counsel felt themselves qualified to supply his place, and decided not to employ a successor.

Guy, indeed, had grown into a stalwart youngster, taller and broader than his elder brother; so much had the pure air, the healthful bush life, the regular exercise and occasional labour demanded by the station exigencies done for his development. He was apt at all the minor rural accomplishments—could ride the unbroken colts, which their own stud now produced, and was well acquainted with the ways and wanderings of outlying cattle. The lore of the Waste, in which old Dick was so able an instructor, was now his. He could plait a hide-rope, make bullock-yokes, noose and throw the unbranded cattle, drive a team, split and put up 'fencing stuff'; in many ways do a man's work, when needed, as efficiently as his preceptor. Dick prophesied that he would become 'a great bushman' in years to come. Indeed, by tales of 'taking up new country' and of the adventurous branches of station life, he had fostered a thirst for more extended and responsible action which gave his parents some uneasiness.

He had begun to acquire the Australian boy's contempt for the narrow bounds involved by a residence on 'purchased land.' He impatiently awaited the day when he should be

able to sally forth, with a herd of his own and the necessary equipment, to seek his fortune amid romantic, unexplored wilds. He began to lose interest in the daily round of home duties; and though from long habit and an affectionate nature, as yet dutifully obedient to his parents' bidding, he more than once confessed that he longed for independent action.

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The season was 'setting in dry.' There had been no rain for months. Around Lake William and near that wide expanse of water an appearance of verdure was preserved by the more marshy portion of the great flats. Amid these the cattle daily revelled and fed. They might have been seen grouped in large droves far out on the promontories, or wading amid the shallowing reed-beds which fringed the shore, long after the sun had set, and the breathless night, boding of storms which came not, had closed in.

Among the neighbours this state of matters by no means passed without observation and remark. Nought save desultory discussion ensued. Except O'Desmond, no one had been long enough in the colony to have had experience of abnormal seasons. Curiously, he was the one who took the more despondent view of matters, from which men augured ill.

'I hope to heaven that we are not going to have a repetition of 1827,' he said; 'one experience of that sort is enough to last a man for his lifetime.'

'Was it so very awful?' said Hamilton, the conversation taking place at Benmohr, at which convenient rendezvous Wilfred and Churbett had encountered that gentleman. 'One fancies that the ancient colonists were not fertile in expedients.'

'No doubt we have much to learn from the accomplished gentlemen who have done us the honour to invest in our colony of late years,' said O'Desmond grandly, with a bow of the regency; 'but if you had seen what I have, you would not undervalue the danger. I don't care to talk about it. Only if this year ends badly, I shall leave Badajos to my old couple and the overseer, muster my stock, and start into the wilderness without waiting for another.'

'What direction shall you take?' said Hamilton.

'Due south, until I strike the head waters of the Sturt and the Warburton. These I shall follow down, and make my depôt wherever I discover a sufficiently tempting base.'

'It has quite the heroic ring about it,' said Wilfred. 'But for certain reasons, I would like to follow you. How about provisions?'

'I take a year's supply of rations and clothing. We drive our meat before us.'

'And the blacks?'

'I know all that can be known about them,' said O'Desmond. 'They recognise chiefs among the white men. If one does not fear them, they are to be dealt with like children.'

'You will find it hard to quit your pleasant life at Badajos for the desert,' said Wilfred.

'Not at all; the sharper the contrast, the more easily is the change made. Besides, on such occasions mine is a well-organised expedition. I take my cook, my groom, my four-in-hand. What do you say? Come with me for the first week or two. I can promise you a chop broiled to perfection. I must show you my "reversible griller," of which I am the proud inventor.'

Here the door was loudly knocked at, and being opened without further ceremony, disclosed the serious countenance of Wullie Teviot, apparently out of breath.

'Maister Hamilton and gentlemen a',' he said, 'I'm no in a poseetion to do my errand respectfully the noo, but hae just breath to warn ye that there's a muckle bush-fire comin' fast frae the direction o' Maister Effingham's. I trust we'll no be the waur o't.'

This ended migratory speculations abruptly. Each man started to his feet. Hamilton left the room to secure a horse and order out his retainers, Wilfred to try and make out whether the heavy spreading cloud on the horizon was across his boundary.

'I and my man will go with Hamilton,' quoth O'Desmond. 'Effingham had better make for home, and see how it is likely to affect him.'

Hamilton was dashing down the paddock on a bare-backed horse by this time, to run up the hacks, and also one for the spring-cart, to be loaded with spare hands for the scene of action, besides that invaluable adjunct in a bush fire, a cask of water.

'I hardly like leaving,' said Wilfred; 'it looks selfish.'

'Don't mind about the sentiment,' said O'Desmond. 'If

your run is afire you will need to help Dick Evans and his party. I'll be bound the old fellow is half-way there already. He is not often caught napping.'

Then Wilfred mounted too, and sped away, galloping madly towards the great masses of ever-increasing smoke-cloud. It proved to be farther off than he expected. He had ridden far and fast, when he reached the border where he could hear the crackling of the tender leaflets, and watched the red line which licked up so cleanly all dry sticks and bush, with every stalk and plant and modest tuft of grass. He then found that the chief duty, not so much of meeting the enemy, as of guiding and persuading him to turn his fiery footsteps in a different direction, was being satisfactorily performed by Richard Evans and his assistants. Guy, in wild delight at being made lieutenant of the party, was dashing ever and anon into the centre of the smoke and flame, and dealing blows with his bough like a Berserker.

'Head it off, lads,' Dick was saying when Wilfred rode up. 'It's no use trying to stop it in the long grass; edge it off towards the ranges. There it may burn till all's blue.'

'Why, Dick,' said he to his trustworthy veteran, 'how did you manage to get here so quickly? They've only just seen it at Benmohr.'

'They'll find it out pretty quick, sir, if there's a shift of wind to-night. It don't need much coaxing our way, but it means Benmohr, with a southerly puff or two. If it gets into that grassy bit by the old stock-yard, it will burn at the rate of fifty mile an hour.'

Hour after hour did they work by the line of fire, ere Dick's vigilance could permit any kind of halt or relaxation. It was exciting, not unpleasant work, Wilfred thought, walking up and down the red-gleaming line of tongues of fire which licked up so remorselessly the tangled herbage, the lower shrubs, the dead flower-stalks, and all scattered branches of the fallen trees.

The night was dark, sultry, and still. As ever and anon the fire caught some tall, dead tree, and running up it, seized the hollow trunk, holding out red signals from each limb and cavity, high up among the branches, the effect against the sombre sky, the dull, massed gloom of the mountain, was grandly effective. In the lurid scene the moving figures

upon whose faces the fierce light occasionally beat, seemed weird and phantasmal. Patiently did the wary leader watch the line of fire, which had been extinguished on the side next to the lower lands, now casting back a half-burned log far within the blackened area, and anon beating out insidious tussocks of dried grass, ignited by a smouldering ember.

When once the defensive line had been subdued, it was easily kept under by sweeping the half-burned grass and sticks back from the still inflammable herbage into the bared space now devoid of fuel. But care was still needed, as ever and again a half-burned tree would crash down across the line, throwing forth sparks and embers, or perhaps lighting up a temporary conflagration.

All the night through, the men kept watch and ward beside the boundary. The strangeness of the scene compensated Wilfred and Guy for the loss of their natural rest as well as for the severity of the exertion. As they watched the flame-path hewing its way unchecked up the rugged mountain-side, lighting up from time to time with wondrous clearness every crag, bush, and tree, to the smallest twig—a nature picture, clear, brilliant, unearthly, framed in the unutterable blackness of the night, it seemed as if they were assisting at some Walpurgis revel; as if in the lone woods, at that mystic hour, the forms of the dead, the spectres of the past, might at any moment arise and mingle with them.

As they lay stretched on the dry sward, in the intervals of rest, they watched the gradual progress of the flame through the rugged, chasm-rifted, forest-clothed mountain. With every ascent gained, the flame appeared to hoist a signal of triumph over the dumb, dark, illimitable forest which surrounded them. Finally, when like a crafty foe it had climbed to the highest peak, the fire, there discovering upon a plateau a mass of brushwood and dry herbage, burst out in one far-seen, wide-flaming beacon, at once a Pharos and a Wonder-sign to the dwellers at a lower elevation.

The bush fire had been fought and conquered. It only remained for Dick and a few to go back on the following day and make sure that the frontier was safe; that no smouldering logs were ready to light up the land again as soon as the breeze should have fanned them sufficiently. The main body of the fire had gone up the mountain range,

where no harm could be done; where, as Dick said, as soon as the first rain came, the grass would be all up again, and make nice, sweet picking for the stock in winter.

The Benmohr people had not been quite so lucky; the wind setting in that direction, the flames had come roaring up to the very homestead, burning valuable pasture and nearly consuming the establishment. As it was, the garden gate caught fire. The farm and station buildings were only preserved by the desperate efforts of the whole force of the place, led on by Argyll and Hamilton, who worked like the leaders of a forlorn hope. After the fight was over and the place saved, Charlie Hamilton, utterly exhausted with the heat and exertion, dropped down in a faint, and had to be carried in and laid on a bed, to the consternation of Mrs. Teviot, who thought he was dead.

It was now the last week of March, and all things looked as bad as they could be. Not a drop of rain worth mentioning had fallen since the spring. The small rivers which ran into Lake William had ceased to flow, and were reduced each to its own chain of ponds. That great sheet of water was daily receding from its shores, shallowing visibly, and leaving islands of mud in different parts of its surface, unpleasantly suggestive of total evaporation. Strange wild-fowl, hitherto unknown in the locality—notably the ibis, the pelican, and the spoonbill—had appeared in great flocks, disputing possession with the former inhabitants. The flats bordering upon the lake, once so luxuriantly covered with herbage, were bare and dusty as a highroad. The constant marching in and out of the cattle to water had caused them to be fed down to the last stalk. Apparently there was no chance of their renewal. The herd, though still healthy and vigorous, was beginning to lose condition; if this were the case now, what tale would the winter have to tell? The yield of milk had so fallen off that merely sufficient was taken for the use of the house. The ground was so hard that it was impossible to plough for the wheat crop, even if there had been likelihood of the plant growing after the seed was sown.

Andrew was clearly of the opinion that Australia much resembled Judea, and that for some good reason the Lord had seen fit to pour down His wrath upon the land, which was now stricken with various plagues and grievous trials.

'I'm no sayin',' he said, 'that the sin o' the people has been a'thegither unpardonable and forbye ordinair'. There's nae doot a wheen swearin' and drinkin' amang thae puir ignorant stock-riders and splitter bodies. Still, they're for the maist pairt a hard delvin', ceevil people, that canna be said to eat the bread o' idleness, and that's no wilfu' in disobeyin' the Word, siccan sma' hearin' as they hae o't. I'm lyin' in deep thocht on my bed nicht after nicht, wearyin' to find ae comfortin' gleam o' licht in this darkness o' Egypt.'

'It's a bad look-out, Andrew,' said Guy, to whom Andrew was confiding his feelings, as he often did to the lad when he was troubled about the well-doing of the community. 'And it will be worse if the cattle die after next winter. Whatever shall we do? We shall never get such a lot of nice, well-bred ones together again. What used the Jews to do in a season like this, I wonder, for they got it pretty bad sometimes, you know, when Jacob sent all his sons into Egypt?'

'I mind weel, Maister Guy,' said the old man solemnly. 'And ye see he had faith that the Lord would provide for him and his sons and dochters. And though they were sair afflicted before the time of deliverance came, they were a' helped and saved in the end. He that brocht ye a' here nae doot will provide. Pray and trust in Him, Maister Guy, and dinna forget what ye learned at your mither's knee, hinny, the God-fearin' lady that she ever was. We must suffer tribulation, doubtless; but dinna fear—oh, dinna lose faith, my bairn, and we shall sing joyful songs i' the oot-come!'

As the season wore on, and the rainless winter was succeeded by the hopeless spring, with drying winds and cloudless days, it seemed as if the tribulation spoken of by Andrew was indeed to be sharp, to the verge of extermination.

Not only were great losses threatened by the destruction of the stock, but the money question was commencing to become urgent. For the past year no sales of stock had been possible. Few had the means of keeping the stock they were possessed of. They were not likely to add to their responsibility by buying others, at however tempting a price. As there was no milk, there was naturally no butter, cheese,

or the wherewithal to fatten the hogs for bacon. These sources of income were obliterated. Having no produce to sell, it became apparent that the articles necessary to be bought were suddenly enhanced in value. Flour rose from twelve and fifteen to fifty, seventy, finally, *one hundred pounds per ton*. Not foreseeing this abnormal rise, Wilfred had sold their preceding year's crop, as usual, as soon as it reached a better price than ordinary, merely retaining a year's supply of flour. That being exhausted, he was compelled, sorely against the grain, to purchase at these famine rates. Rice, which could be imported cheaply, was largely mingled with the flour, as a matter of economy. The bread was scarcely so palatable, but by the help of Jeanie's admirable baking, little difference was felt.

Mr. Rockley confided that he felt deeply reluctant to charge him and other friends such high prices for the necessaries of life. The difficulties of carriage, however, were now amazing. Numbers of the draught cattle had perished, and fodder was obliged to be carried by the teams on their journeys, enhancing the cost indefinitely.

'The fact is,' said that unreserved merchant, 'I am losing on all sides. The smaller farmers in my debt have no more chance of paying me, before the rain comes, than if they were in gaol. Everybody purchases the smallest quantity of goods that they can do with, and I have great difficulty in buying in Sydney at prices which will leave any margin of profit. But you come in and dine with us this evening. I've got a bottle of claret left, in spite of the hard times. And keep up your spirits, my boy! We shall come out of this trouble as we've done through others. This country wasn't meant for faint-hearted people, was it? If all comes right, we shall be proud of having stuck to the ship manfully, eh? If not, it's better to give three cheers when she goes down, than to whine and snivel. Come along in. I've done with business for the day.'

And so Wilfred, who had ridden to Yass in a state of despondency, went in and was comforted, as happened to him many a time and often, under that hospitable roof. The dinner was good though the times were bad, while Rockley's claret was unimpeachable, as of old. Mrs. Rockley and Christabel were more than usually warm and sympathetic of

manner. As he sat in the moonlight with Rockley and the ladies (who had joined them), and heard from his host tales of previous hard seasons and how they had been surmounted, he felt his heart stir with unwonted hope and a resolve to fight this fight to the end.

'I've seen these seasons before,' said the energetic optimist, 'and I've always remarked that they were followed by a period of prosperity. Think of the last drought we had, and what splendid seasons followed it! This looks as bad as anything *can* look, but if I could get long odds, I wouldn't mind betting that before 1840 we're crowded with buyers, and that stock, land, and city property touch prices never reached before. Look forward, Wilfred, my boy, look forward! There's nothing to be done without it, in a new country, take my word.'

'You must admit that it's hard to see anything cheering just at present.'

'Not at all, not at all,' said his host, lighting another cigar. 'Christabel, go in and sing something. It's all a matter of calculation. Say that half your cattle die—mind you, you've no business to let 'em die, if you can help it—hang on by your eyelids, that's the idea—but say half of 'em *do* die, why, the moment the rain comes the remainder are twice as valuable as they were before, perhaps more than that, if a new district is discovered. By the way, there *is* a report of a new settlement down south; if it comes to anything, see what a rush there'll be for stock, to take over on speculation. That's the great advantage of a new country; if one venture goes wrong, there are a dozen spring up for you to choose from.'

'Do you think it would be a good idea to take away part of the stock, and try and find a new station?'

'I really believe it would; and if I were a young man to-morrow it's the very thing that I would go in for. We have not explored a tenth part of the boundless—I say boundless—pasture lands of this continent. No doubt there are millions of acres untouched, as good as we have ever occupied.'

'But are they not so far off as to be valueless?'

'No land that will carry sheep or cattle, or grow grain, can be valueless in Australia for the next century to come. And

with the increase of population, all outer territories will assume a positive value as soon as the present depression is over.'

While in Yass, Wilfred consulted their good friend and adviser, Mr. Sternworth, who had indeed, by letter, when not able to visit them personally, not ceased to cheer and console during the disheartening season.

'This is a time of trial, my dear Wilfred,' he said, 'that calls out the best qualities of a man, in the shape of courage, faith, and self-denial. It is the day of adversity, when we are warned not to faint. I can fully enter into your distress and anxiety, while seeing the daily loss and failure of all upon which you depended for support. It is doubly hard for you, after a term of success and progress. But we must have faith —unwavering faith—in the Supreme Ruler of events, and doubt not—doubt not for one moment, my boy—but that we shall issue unharmed and rejoicing out of this tribulation.'

Among their neighbours, unusual preparations were made to lighten the impending calamity. Unnecessary labourers were discharged. The daily work of the stations was, in great measure, done by the proprietors. The Teviots were the only domestic retainers at Benmohr; they, of course, and Dick Evans were a part of the very composition of the establishments, and not to be dispensed with. The D'Oyleys discharged their cook and stock-rider, performing these necessary duties by turns, week alternate.

Fred Churbett retained his married couple and stock-rider, declaring that he would die like a gentleman; that he could pay his way for two years more; after which, if times did not mend, he would burn the place down, commit suicide decently, and leave the onus on destiny. He could not cook, neither would he wash clothes. He would be as obstinate as the weather.

O'Desmond made full preparations for a migration in spring, if the weather continued dry and no rain fell in September. There would be a slight spring of grass then, rain or no rain. He would take advantage of it, to depart, like a patriarch of old, not exactly with his camels and she-asses, but with his cattle and brood mares, his sheep and his oxen, his men-servants and his maid-servants—well perhaps not the latter, but everything necessary to give a flavour of

true colonisation to the movement. And he travelled in good style, with such observances and ceremony as surrounded Harry O'Desmond in all that he did, and made him the wonder and admiration of less favoured individuals.

He had his waggonette and four-in-hand, the horses of which, corn-fed at the commencement, would, after they got on to the grasses of the great interior levels, fare well and indeed fatten on the journey. A roomy tent, as also a smaller one for his body-servant, cook, and kitchen utensils, shielded him and his necessaries from the weather. Portable bath and dining-table, couch, and toilette requisites were available at shortest notice; while a groom led his favourite hackney, upon which he mounted whenever he desired to explore a mountain peak or an unknown valley. The cottage was handed over to the charge of the gardener and his wife, old servants of the establishment. And finally, the long-expected rain not appearing in September, he departed, like a Spanish conquistador of old, to return with tales of wondrous regions, of dusky slaves, of gold, of feather-crowned Caciques, and palm-fanned isles, or to leave his whitening bones upon mountain summit or lonely beach.

It was believed among his old friends that Harry O'Desmond would either return successful, with hardly-won territory attached to his name, or that he would journey on over the great desert, which was supposed then to form the interior of the continent, until return was hopeless.

His servants would be faithful unto death. None would ever question his order of march. And if he were not successful in founding a kingdom, to be worked as a relief province for Badajos, he would never come back at all. Some day there would be found the traces of a white man's encampment, amid tribes of natives as yet unknown—the shreds of tents, the waggonette wheels, the scattered articles of plate, and the more ordinary utensils of the white man. From beneath a spreading tree would be exhumed the bones of the leader of the party. Such would be the memorials of a pioneer and explorer, who was never known to turn back or confess himself unsuccessful.

As to the labour question, Dick Evans and his wife were indispensable now, more than ever, as the brothers had resolved not to remain *in statu quo*. Wilfred had determined

to organise an expedition, and to take the greater part of the herd with him. In such a case it would have been suicidal to deprive themselves of Dick's services, as, of course, he would be only too eager to make one of the party. He cheerfully submitted to a diminution of wages, stating that as long as he and the old woman had a crust of bread and a rag to their backs they would stand by the captain and the family.

'If we could only get through the winter,' he said, 'I shouldn't have no fear but we'd box about down south with the cattle till we dropped on a run for them. There's a lot of fine country beyond the Snowy, if we'd only got a road over the mountains to it. But it's awful rough, and the blacks would eat up a small party like ours. I don't hardly like the thoughts of tacklin' it. But what I'm afraid on is, that if the winter comes on dry we'll have *no cattle to take*. They're a-gettin' desprit low now, and the lake's as good as dried up.'

The outlook was gloomy indeed when even the sanguine Dick Evans could make no better forecast. But Wilfred was the sailing-master, and it did not become him to show hesitation.

'We must do our best, and trust in God, Dick,' he said. 'This is a wonderful country for changes; one may come in the right direction yet.'

As for Andrew and Jeanie, they would not hear of taking any wages until times improved. They had cast in their lot with the family, and Jeanie would stay with her mistress and the girls, who were dear to her as her own children, as long as there was a roof to shelter them.

Andrew fully recognised it as a 'season of rebuke and blasphemy.' He who ordered the round world had, for inscrutable reasons, brought this famine upon them. Like the children of Israel, he doubted but they would have to follow the advice given in 1 Kings xviii. 5: 'And Ahab said to Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks; peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts.'

'And did they?' asked Guy.

'Nae doot; as maist like we shall do gin we use the same

means as gracious Elijah. No that I'm free to testify that I conseeder the slayin' o' the prophets o' Baal a'thegither a needcessity. It wad have been mair wiselike on the pairt o' Elijah to have disestablished their kirk and garred them lippen a' their days to the voluntary principle. But let that flee stick to the wa'; dinna doot, laddie, that ae day the heavens will be black wi' clouds, and there will be a great rain.'

Perhaps the one of the whole party most to be pitied was Howard Effingham. With the eagerness of a sanguine nature, he had become fixed in the idea that the prosperity with which they had commenced was to be continuous. Inspired with that belief he had, as we have seen, commenced to indulge himself with the reproduction, on a small scale, of the pleasant surroundings of the old country. He had fancied that the production of cattle, cheese, butter, bacon, and cereals would go on almost automatically henceforth, with a moderate amount of exertion on Wilfred's part and of supervision on his own. It was not in his nature to be absorbed in the money-making part of their life; but in the acclimatisation of birds, beasts, and fishes, in the organisation of the Hunt Club, in the greyhound kennel, and in the stable his interest was unfailing, and his energy wonderful.

Now, unfortunately, to his deep regret and mortification, he saw his beloved projects rendered nugatory, worthless, and in a manner contemptible, owing to this woeful season.

What was likely to become of the fish if the lake dried up, as it showed every disposition to do? How was one to go forth fowling and coursing when every spare moment was utilised for some purpose of necessity?

As for the hounds, some arrangement would have to be made about feeding and exercising these valuable animals. The horseflesh was wanting, the time was not to be spared, the meat and meal were not always forthcoming. Terrible to imagine, the kennel was commencing to be an incubus and an oppression!

In the midst of this doubt and uncertainty a letter came from a well-known sportsman, Mr. Robert Malahyde, keenest of the keen, offering to take charge of the hounds until the season became more tolerable. His district was not so unfavourably situated as the neighbourhood of Yass, and

from his larger herds and pastures he would be able to arrange the 'boiler' part of the management more easily than Mr. Effingham.

A meeting of the subscribers was quickly called, when it was agreed that the hounds be sent to Mummumberil till the seasons changed.

As for the pheasants and partridges, which had flourished so encouragingly during the first season, the curse of the time had fallen even on them. The native cat (dasyurus) had increased wonderfully of late. Berries and grass seeds were scanty in this time of famine. In consequence, the survival of the fittest, coupled with acts of highly natural selection, ensued. The native cats selected the young of the exotic birds, but few of the adult game seemed likely to survive this drought.

CHAPTER XX

AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT

An expedition was to be organised in spring, and the stock removed, no matter where. It would be the only chance for their lives. As it was, the winter was fast coming upon them. Every blade of the ordinary herbage had disappeared. The nights commenced to lengthen. Frosts of unusual severity had set in. Even now it seemed as if their last hope might be destroyed and their raft dashed on the rocks ere it was floated.

But one morning Dick Evans came up to Wilfred, sadly contemplating the attenuated cows which now represented the once crowded milking-yard. He was riding his old mare, barebacked, with his folded coat for a saddle, and spoke with unusual animation.

'I believe we're right for the winter after all, sir. I never thought to see this, though old Tom told me he'd know'd it happen once afore.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, I took a big walk this morning to see if I could find tracks of this old varmint. I thought she might be dead, but I warn't satisfied, so I took a regular good cruise. I found some tracks by the lake, where I hadn't been for some time, and there sure enough I finds my lady, as snug as a wallaby in a wheat patch. Look how she's filled herself, sir.'

Wilfred replied that the old mare appeared to have found good quarters.

'When I got to the lake, sir, I was reg'lar stunned. It was as dry as a bone, but through the mud there was a crop of "fat hen" comin' up all over, miles and miles of it, as thick

as a lucerne field on the Hunter. The old mare was planted in a patch where it was pretty forrard. But it's growin' so's you can see it, and there'll be feed enough in a week or two for all our cattle and every hoof within twenty miles of the lake.'

'Wonderful news, Dick; and this "fat hen," as you call it, is good and wholesome food for stock?'

'Can't beat it, sir; first-chop fattening stuff; besides, there's rushes and weeds growin' among it. You may pound it, we'll have no more trouble with the cattle for the winter, and they'll be in good fettle to start south in the spring.'

This was glorious news. It was duly related at the breakfast-table, and after that meal Wilfred and Guy betook themselves to the lake. There they beheld one of Nature's wondrous transformations.

The great lake lay before them, dry to its farthermost shore. The headlands stood out, frowning in gloomy protest against the conversion of their shining sea into a tame green meadow. Such, in good sooth, had it actually become. Through the moist but rapidly hardening mud of the lake-surface millions of plants were pushing themselves with vigour and luxuriance, caused by the richness of the ooze from which they sprang. Far as the eye could see, a green carpet was spread over the lately sombre-coloured expanse. The leaves of the most forward plants were rounded and succulent, while nothing could be more grateful to the long-famished cattle than the full and satisfying mouthfuls which were in parts of the little bays already procurable.

Even now, guided by the mysterious instinct which sways the hosts of the brute creation so unerringly, small lots had established themselves in secluded spots, showing by their improved appearance how unusual had been the supply of provender.

'What a wonderful thing,' said Guy; 'who would ever have thought of the old lake turning into a cabbage-garden like this? Dick says this stuff makes very good greens if you boil it. Why, we can let Churbett and the Benmohr people send their cattle over if it keeps growing—as Dick says—till it's as high as your head. But how in the world did this seed get here? That's what I want to know. The lake hasn't been dry for ten years, that's certain, I believe. Well, now, did this seed—tons of it—lie in the mud all that

time; and if not, how was it to be sowed, broadcast, after the water dried up?'

'Who can tell?' said Wilfred. 'Nature holds her secrets close. I am inclined to think this seed must have been in the earth, and is now vivified by the half-dry mud. However it may be, it is a crop we shall have good cause to remember.'

'I hope it will pull us through the winter and that's all,' said Guy. 'I mustn't be done out of my trip down south. I want to find a new country, and make all our fortunes in a large gentlemanlike way, like Mr. St. Maur told us of. You don't suppose he goes milking cows and selling cheese and bacon.'

'You mustn't despise homely profits, Guy,' said the elder. 'Some of the largest proprietors began that way, and you know that "Laborare est orare," as the old monks said.'

'Oh yes, I know that,' said the boy; 'but there's all the difference between Columbus discovering America, or Cortez when he climbed the tree in Panama and saw two oceans, and being the mate of a collier. I must have a try at this exploring before I'm much older. There's such a lot of country no one knows about yet.'

'You will have your chance, old fellow, and your triumph, like others, I hope. But remember that obedience goes before command, and that Captain Cook was a boy in a collier before he became a finder of continents.

Wilfred found it necessary to ride over to Benmohr to arrange definitely about the time of departure. He had nearly reached the well-known gate when a horseman rode forward from the opposite direction. He was well mounted, and led a second horse, upon which was a pack-saddle. Both animals were in better condition than was usual in this time of tribulation.

Effingham was about to pass the stranger, whose bronzed features, half concealed by a black beard, he did not recall, when he reined his horses suddenly.

'You don't remember me, Mr. Effingham. I am on my way to the old place. I've got something to tell you.'

It took more than another glance to enable him to recognise the speaker, and then it was a half-instinctive guess that prompted him to connect the bold black eyes and swarthy countenance with Hubert Warleigh.

'The same,' said the horseman. 'I saw you did not know me; most likely took me for a station overseer or a gentleman. I was a swagman when you saw me last, so I'm getting on, you see.'

'I beg you a thousand pardons,' said Wilfred, shaking his hand cordially. 'I did not know you at first sight; the beard alters your appearance, you must admit. I hope you are coming to stay with us. My father will be delighted to see you. He often speaks of you.'

'I thank him, and you too. If *my* father had been like him, I should have been a different man. But I had better tell you my business before we go farther. They say you are going to shift the cattle; is that true?'

'We start almost at once. But we haven't settled the route.'

'That's just as well. I've found a grand country-side away to the south, and came to show you the way—that is, if you believe my story.'

'Look here,' cried Wilfred excitedly, 'come with me to Benmohr to-night, and we'll talk it over with Argyll and Hamilton. We must hold a council over it. It's near sundown, and I intended to stay there.'

Hubert Warleigh drew back. 'I don't know either of them to speak to. The fact is, I have lived so much more in the men's huts than the masters' until the last few months, that I don't fancy going anywhere unless I'm asked.'

'Come as my friend,' said Wilfred impetuously. 'It is time you took your proper position. Besides, you are the bearer of good tidings—of news which may be the saving of us all.'

He allowed himself to be persuaded. So the two young men rode up to the garden gate, at which portal they were met by Argyll. Ardmillan and Neil Barrington were playing quoits on the brown lawn. Fred Churbett (of course) was reading in the verandah.

'Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Hubert Warleigh,' said Wilfred. 'He has just come in from a journey, and I have prevailed on him to accompany me.'

'Most happy to see you, Mr. Warleigh,' said Argyll, with cordial gravity. (He knew all about 'Gyp' Warleigh, and

had probably said contemptuous things, but accepted Wilfred's lead, and followed suit.) 'The man will take your horses. Effingham, you know your way to the barracks.'

Hubert Warleigh followed his newly-acquired comrade into the building, where the appearance of matters indicated that some of the other habitués had been recently adorning themselves. Mrs. Teviot, however, promptly appeared on the scene with half-a-dozen towels, and supplies of warm water.

'Weel, Maister Effingham, this is a sair time and a sorrowfu'. To think o' a' the gentlemen gangin' clean awa', and a' the milch kye, puir things, into thae waste places o' the yearth, and maybe deein' o' drouth or hunger, and naebody to hae a crack wi' but thae fearsome saavages.'

'It's very hard upon all of us, Mrs. Teviot, but if it won't rain, what are we to do? We can't stay at home and let the cattle die. You know the Israelites used to take away their beasts in time of famine, and they seem to have had them pretty often.'

'How do you do, Mrs. Teviot?' said Warleigh. 'How's Wullie this dry weather? I suppose you forget me staying a night in the hut with old Tom Glendinning, three or four years ago.'

'Gude sake, laddie!' said the old woman in a tone of deep surprise, 'and is that you, clothed and in your right mind, like the puir body in the Book? And has some one casten oot your deevil? Oh, hinnie! but I'm a prood woman the day to see your father's son tak' his place amang gentlefolk ance mair. The Lord guide ye and strengthen ye in the richt path! Man, ye lookit sae douce and wiselike, hoo was I to ken ye, the rantin' dare-deevil that ye were syne?'

'I have been living among the blacks, Mrs. Teviot,' said the prodigal, with a transient glance of humour in his deep eye; 'perhaps that may have improved me. But I am going to try to be a gentleman again, if I don't find it too dull.'

'Aweel! The denner is dishen' up the noo; dinna wait to preen yersels ower muckle,' added the good old dame as she vanished.

In despite of her warning, her old acquaintance produced several articles of raiment from the large valise, which had

been unstrapped from his led horse, and proceeded to change his dress. When they walked into the house Wilfred thought he had rarely seen a handsomer man.

His clear, bronzed complexion, his classically cut features, his large dark eyes, with, what was then more uncommon than is the case now, a bushy, coal-black beard, made the effect of his countenance picturesque and striking in no ordinary degree.

His tall and powerful frame, developed by toil and exercise into the highest degree of muscular strength, was perfect in its symmetry as that of a gladiator. His very walk showed the effect of years of woodcraft, with the hunter's lightness of footstep, and firm, elastic tread. As he entered the dining-room there was a look of surprise, even admiration, visible on every face.

'Mr. Warleigh,' said Argyll, 'allow me to make my friends known to you. Hamilton, my partner—Ardmillan—Forbes—Neil Barrington—Fred Churbett. Now, you are all acquainted. Dinner and Mrs. Teviot won't admit of further formalities.'

In despite of his former preferences for humble companionship, and his depreciation of his own manners and habitudes, Wilfred was pleased and interested by the unaffected bearing of his protégé during the dinner ceremony. He well knew all the men present by reputation, though they had no previous acquaintance with him, except, perhaps, as a stock-rider on a cattle-camp.

Without attempting to assume equality of language or mingle in discussion, for which his lack of education unfitted him, he yet bore himself in such self-possessed if unpretending fashion as impressed both guests and entertainers.

When the dinner was cleared away, and pipes were lit, in accordance with the custom of bachelor households (O'Desmond's always honourably excepted), Wilfred Effingham thought the time favourable for opening the serious business of the evening.

'I take it for granted,' he said, 'that we are all agreed to start for "fresh fields and pastures new" in a few days. Equally certain that we have not settled the route. Is that not so? Then let me take this occasion of stating that Mr. Warleigh has arrived from the farthest out station on the

south, and that he is in possession of valuable information as to new country.'

'By Jove!' said Argyll, 'that is the very thing we were discussing when you rode up, and are as far from a decision as ever. If Mr. Warleigh can give us directions, we ought to be able to keep a course moderately well—I mean with the aid of an azimuth compass.'

'Argyll would undertake to find the road to Heaven with that compass of his,' said Ardmillan.

When the laugh had subsided, which arose from this allusion to a well-known habit of Argyll's, who always carried a compass with him—even to church, it was asserted—and was wont to state that no one but an idiot could possibly lose his way in Australia who had sense enough to comprehend the points of that invaluable instrument—Hubert Warleigh said quietly, 'I'm afraid the road to my country is a good deal like the road to h—ll, that is, in the way of being the most infernal bad line for scrub, mountain, and deep rivers I ever tackled, and that's saying a good deal. But I promised Captain Effingham to do him a good turn when I got the chance, and when I heard of this dry season I came prepared to show the way, if he liked to send his stock over, and go myself. As you all seem to be in the same box, equally hard up, I don't mind acting as guide. We'll be all the better for going as a strong party, as the blacks are treacherous beggars and the tribes strong.'

'The road, you say, is as bad as bad can be,' said Hamilton. 'I suppose the good country makes up for it when you get there?'

'I've seen all the best part of New South Wales,' said the explorer. 'I never saw anything that was a patch on it before. Open forest country, rivers running from the Snowy Mountains to the sea, splendid lakes, and a regular rainfall.'

'The last is better than all,' said Hamilton. 'One feels tired of working up to a decent thing, and then having it knocked down by a change of season. I, for one, will take the plunge. I am ready to start at once for this interesting country, where the rivers don't dry up, the grass grows at least once a year, and rain is not a triennial phenomenon.'

'The same here!—and—I, and I,' came from the other proprietors.

'I suppose there's room enough for all of us; we needn't tread on each other's toes when we reach the land of promise?' said Ardmillan.

'Enough for the whole district of Yass and something to spare,' said their guest. 'I was only over a portion of it, but I could see no end of open country from the hill-tops. It's a place that will bear heavy stocking—thickly grassed and no waste country to speak of. After you leave the mountains, which are barren and rough enough, you drop down all of a sudden upon thinly-timbered downs—marshy in places, but grass up to your eyes everywhere.'

'I like that notion of marshes,' said Fred Churbett pensively. 'I feel as I should enjoy the melody of the cheerful frog again. His voice has been so long silent in the land that I should hail him as a species of nightingale, always supposing that he was girt by his proper surroundings of the "sword-grass and the oat-grass and the bulrush by the pool."'

'How was it you managed to drop across this delightful province, Warleigh?' said Wilfred. 'I should like to hear, if you don't mind telling us, how you crossed the mountains towards the south. Old Tom and Dick Evans said they were inaccessible; that there was no good country between them and the coast.'

'Old Tom knew better,' said their guest quietly. 'We had a long talk the last time I was at Warbrok; he said then if any one could find a road for cattle the other side of the Snowy River, after you pass Wahgulmerang, he was dead certain there was any amount of fine country beyond, between it and the coast.'

'How did he get to know?'

'It seems he was stock-keeping once on one of the farthest out runs, and a mate of his, who was "wanted" for some cross work or other, came along and asked him to put him away for a bit, till the police got tired of hunting him. The old man gave him some rations, and told him of a track through the gullies, which took him to the leading spur, by which, of course, he could get on to the table land. Only an odd white man or so had ever been there. After a week he got "tired of looking at forty thousand blooming mountains" (as he told Tom afterwards), and being a resolute

chap, with gun and ammunition, he thought he would make in towards the coast. Anyhow he was away all the winter. When he came back he told Tom that he had dropped in with a small tribe of blacks, who had taken to him. They spent the winter by the side of a great lake, fishing and hunting. There was plenty of fine grass country in all directions when you got over the main range.'

'And why did he come away from Arcadia?' asked Argyll.

'From where?' asked the unclassical narrator. 'No; that wasn't the name. It was Omeo. A grand sheet of water on a kind of hill-plain, with ranges all round, and one tremendous snow-peak you could see from anywhere. Well, he got tired of the whole thing—didn't know when he was well off, like most men of his sort—so he made tracks back again. Old Tom didn't believe all the story. But he thought afterwards that there must be something in it, and that it would be worth while some day to have a throw in and find the lake at any rate.'

'Then we are to suppose that you made the attempt and succeeded?' said Ardmillan. 'I confess that I envy you. But how did you manage by yourself?'

'You remember the day I left your place?' said Gyp Warleigh, nodding to Wilfred. 'I felt so savage and ashamed of myself that I determined to do something, or get rubbed out in the attempt. So I made through Monaro, crossed the Snowy River near Buckley's crossing, and made straight for the foot of the big range. I was well armed, and had as much rations as I could carry. I knew the blacks were bad, but I had lived with more than one tribe, and thought I could manage them. I set myself to track the man old Tom spoke of. Of course, I'm a fair bushman,' he added gravely. 'I've never done anything else much all my life, so there's no great credit in it.'

'Had you no compass with you?' inquired Argyll. 'No? Then I differ from you in thinking there was nothing extraordinary in the adventure. Not one man in ten thousand would have risked it, or come out with his life.'

'What does a man want with a compass who can see the sun now and then?' asked the Australian. 'He can steer by the lie of the country, the course of the water, if he has

the bushman's eye. I tracked up the old man's mate, and found his first camp on the table land. It was easy after that. He couldn't help but follow the leading range. It wasn't such rough country after the first day. Game was plenty, so I lived well.'

'How about the niggers?' asked Churbett. 'I should have felt too nervous to sketch or make any use of my opportunities. Fancy going to sleep at night and thinking you mightn't want any breakfast!'

'I had a better chance than most men. I'm half a blackfellow myself in the way of knowing their language and most of their ways. I did one of their old men a service, and he taught me a secret that saved my life more than once. Still, I didn't want to run across them if I could help it.'

'I should have thought you couldn't avoid them,' said Hamilton. 'They are great trackers, and have eyes like hawks.'

'I know that, but I could see their smokes a long way. I lay by during the day and travelled late and early. One day I climbed a tree on the top of a range, when I saw a cluster of snowy mountains, and on the far side of them the waters of a lake. I had found Omeo.'

'You must have felt like Columbus or Cortez gazing upon the two oceans,' said Ardmillan. 'What a grand sensation.'

'Columbus discovered America, didn't he? The other chap I don't remember hearing about. Well, I partly discovered Omeo, I suppose, and a bitter cold morning it was. I crawled down to the shore, and before I got there could see miles and miles of splendid open country, stretching away to the west. There were no more mountains; and as I pulled up next day, on the bank of a big river, I found myself surrounded by a tribe of blacks.'

'They slew you, of course,' said Fred Churbett. 'Lights half turn, and slow music from the orchestra. What a dramatic situation! If they didn't do that, Warleigh, what did they do?'

'It was a close shave, I tell you,' said the hero of the adventure. 'But they had just lost a fellow of about my age; so they adopted me, as luck would have it. I could patter their lingo a bit, for they talked a sort of Kamilaroi, in

which I could make myself understood. Anyhow I lived three or four months with them, and wandered nearer the coast. The country kept getting better, and the grass was something to see after this brickfield of a place. Towards spring my friends drew back to the Monaro side again, and one fine day I gave them the slip, and here I am now, good for the return trip. All I can do for any of you in the way of showing new country, you're welcome to. I'm bound to Mr. Effingham and his father first of all. I'm their man till the exploring racket's finished.'

'Gentlemen,' said Argyll, rising to his feet oratorically, 'friends, countrymen, and fellow-pastoralists, I feel assured that you are all grateful for the unexpected turn our plans have taken, owing to the valuable information conveyed to us this night by my gallant and honourable friend, Mr. Hubert Warleigh. If he carries out his promise of acting as guide to us as far as this fair unknown land, I know you too well to think for one moment that he will be suffered to confer this benefit upon us gratuitously, the power to do which he has acquired at peril of his life. (Hear, hear.) I beg to move that every man present at this meeting pledges himself to contribute in kind, say at the rate of ten per cent of his number, with the object of forming a herd with which Mr. Warleigh may begin squatting life in the fine district he has been fortunate enough to discover.'

The proposition was carried by acclamation. Further suggested by Neil Barrington, 'that this meeting do drink Mr. Warleigh's health,' and Mrs. Teviot appearing with the 'materials,' which included a bottle of Glenlivet, the suggestion was forthwith carried out.

Mr. Warleigh quietly declined the cheering beverage, and after a mild request that he would change his mind, no notice was taken of the eccentric proceeding. When at a tolerably late hour Wilfred and Hubert retired to the barracks, the greatest unanimity prevailed. They were provided with a goal and a guide. Nothing could be more satisfactory. From the first they would have a course, and when the difficulties of the road arose, they could, as a strong and united band, overcome ordinary obstacles, and protect themselves from known dangers.

On the following morning Wilfred returned to The Chase,

having persuaded his newly-acquired friend to accompany him, not, however, without some difficulty.

'You have no notion,' he said, 'how queer and strange I felt at Benmohr last night. I am the equal of any man there by birth, yet I could see that they were helping me not to feel out of place, knowing what they did. I couldn't help thinking that I was like a stock-rider that comes in and stands twisting his cabbage-tree hat before the master and his friends, when he's asked if everything will be ready for the muster next day, and if he'll have a glass of grog.'

'But, my dear fellow, you could never look like that; your appearance—excuse me for alluding to it—gives you a great pull in society. After all, how many men are there who have had every advantage that education can give them, who chiefly hold their tongues, or say nothing worth listening to when they do speak.'

'Ah, but they understand things if they don't talk; a poor ignorant devil like me, when he hears matters touched on, as happened last night, without any of them intending it, for they tried not to talk above me, knows no more than the dead what they are at. I feel as if I could cut my throat when it comes across me that, by other people's neglect and my own folly, I have lost the best part of my birthright.'

'There's time yet,' said Wilfred, deeply touched by the sadness of the tone, in which this grand stalwart cadet of a good house bewailed the fate which had reduced him, mentally, to the condition of a bullock-driver.

'You are young enough yet for anything; there is time enough and to spare for you to improve yourself. So don't be downhearted. As I said before, your looks and your family name will carry you through anything.'

'If I thought so,' said the younger son, 'I might do something, even now, to mend matters. And you really think that a man of my age could make himself as good at books as some of the men we have just met, for instance?'

'I *have* known men beginning late in life,' said Wilfred, 'who passed stiff examinations, and when they commenced they could do little but read and write. Now you are steady and have full control over yourself, have you not?'

'God knows!' said his companion drearily. 'I won't go

so far as that; but I haven't touched a drop of anything since your father shook hands with me at Warbrok, and I don't intend, for seven years at any rate. I knelt down as soon as I was out of sight, and swore a solemn oath against anything stronger than tea. And so far I've kept it.'

Much surprised were all at The Chase when Wilfred and his companion rode up, and after a hurried introduction, passed on together to the former's bedroom.

The young ladies endeavoured as much as possible to prevent themselves from gazing too uninterruptedly at the interesting quasi-stranger; but found it to be a difficult task.

In despite of the educational defects and social disabilities of Hubert Warleigh, there was about him a grandly unconscious, imperturbable expression, like that of an Indian chief, which suited well his splendid figure and bronzed features. He quietly addressed his host and answered a few questions with but little change of countenance, and it was only after an unusually playful sally on the part of Annabel that he relaxed into a frank smile, which showed an unblemished set of teeth, under his drooping moustache.

'I feel as if he had been taken in battle, and we were holding him in captivity,' said that sportive maiden, after the girls had retired to Mrs. Effingham's room for their final talk.

> 'All stern of look and strong of limb
> The chieftain gazed around;
> And silently they looked on him
> As on a lion bound.

He has just that sort of air—very picturesque, of course—for he is the handsomest man I ever saw; don't you think so, Rosamond? I suppose he can read and write? What a cruel shame to have brought him up like that? Fancy Selden reared in such a way, mamma?'

'I can hardly fancy such a thing, my dear imaginative child,' said the mother. 'But how thankful we ought to be that we have been able to keep dear Selden at school, even in this trying time.'

Mr. Effingham, who attributed the change which had taken place in Hubert Warleigh's habits in some measure to his own exhortation, was very pleased and proud. He welcomed the young man into his family circle with warmth,

and in every way endeavoured to neutralise the *gêne* of the position by drawing him out upon topics in which his personal experience told to advantage.

He constrained him to repeat the tale of his exploration, and dwelt with great interest upon his sojourn with the blacks, which, he said, deserved a place in one of Fenimore Cooper's novels.

Annabel wanted to know whether there were any young men in the tribe who at all resembled Uncas. But Hubert had never heard of Chingachgook or of his heroic son. Magua and Hawkeye were as unknown to his unfurnished mind as the personages of the Nibelungen-Lied. So they were compelled to avoid quotations in their conversation, and only to use the cheapest form of English which is made. It was a matter of regret to these kind-hearted people when they made any allusion which they perceived to be as the word of an unknown tongue to the stranger within their gates. His half-puzzled, half-pained look was piteous to see. It was like that of some dumb creature struggling for speech, or blindly feeling for a half-familiar object.

To the artless benevolence of youth it would have been interesting to remedy the deficiencies of a nature originally rich and receptive, but void and barren from lack of ordinary culture. Mrs. Effingham, however, compelled to regard things from a matron's point of view, was not sorry to think that this picturesque, neglected orphan would in a few days quit their abode for a long journey.

As the time drew near, and preparations were proceeded with, a great sadness commenced to overspread The Chase. Wilfred had never been absent for any lengthened period before, nor Guy for more than a week under any pretence whatever. He was frantic with delight at the change of plan.

'I'm so glad that "Gyp" Warleigh is going with us, even if he hadn't found this new district. Dick says he's the best bushman in the country, and can go straight through a scrub and come out right the other side, without sun or compass or anything, just like a blackfellow. You see what a place I'll have across the mountains after a year or two.'

'I wish it was not so far and so dangerous, my child, as I am sure it must be,' said Mrs. Effingham, stroking the boy's fair brow, as she looked sadly at the eager face, bright

with the unquestioning hopes of youth. You will enjoy the travel and adventure and even the risk, but think how anxious your poor mother and sisters will be!'

'Oh, I'll write by every chance,' said Guy, anxious as a page who sees the knights buckle on armour for the first skirmish, not to be deprived of his share of the fray. 'There will be lots of opportunities by people coming back.'

'What! from a place just discovered?' said his mother, with a gentle incredulity.

'Ah, but Dick says if it's half as fine as Hurbert Warleigh calls it—not that he's a man to say a word more than it deserves—that it will be rushed like all new settlements with hundreds of people, and there will be a town and a post-office and all kinds of humbug in no time. People move faster in Australia than in that slow old Surrey.'

'You mustn't say a word against our dear old home, my boy,' said his mother, playfully threatening him, 'or I shall fear your being turned into a backwoodsman, or at any rate something different from an English gentleman, and that would break my heart. But I hope plenty of tradespeople and farmers, and persons of all kinds, will come to your Eldorado. It will make it all the safer, and more comfortable for you all.'

'Farmers, mother!' said the boy indignantly. 'What are you thinking of? We don't want any poking farmers there, taking up the best of the flats and the waterholes after we have found the country and fought the blacks for them. We can keep it well enough with our rifles. All I want is a good large run, and not to see a soul near it except my own stock-riders for years to come.'

'You are going to be quite a mediæval baron, Guy,' said Annabel, who had stolen up and taken his hand in hers, the three hearts beating closely in unison. 'I suppose you will set up a dungeon for refractory vassals.'

'I am sure he will be a good boy, and remember his mother's teachings when she is far away,' said the fond parent, as the tears filled her eyes, looking at the fair, bright-eyed face which she might never see more after the last wave of her hand—the last fond, lingering farewell, which was so soon to be.

Well it is for the young and strong, who go laughing and

shouting into the battle of life, as if there were no ambuscades, defeats, weary retreats, or hopeless resistance. Well for the sailor boy, who leaps on to the deck as if there were no wreck or tempest, fatal mermaid or dead men's bones, beneath the smiling, inconstant wave! They have at least their hour of hot-blooded fight and stubborn resistance to relentless Destiny. But, ah me! how fares it with those who are left behind, condemned to dreary watchings, for tidings that come not—to sickening fears, that all too soon resolve themselves into the reality of doom? These are the earth's true martyrs—the fond mother—the devoted wife—the loving sisters — the saddened father. Theirs the torture and the stake, sacrificed to which they are in some form or other, while life lasts.

CHAPTER XXI

A GREEN HAND

MATTERS were well advanced for the road. The thousand-and-one trifles that are so easily forgotten before the commencement of a long journey, and so sorely missed afterwards, were nearly completed under the tireless tendance of Dick Evans. The three young men were chatting in the verandah, after a long day's drafting, when a strange horseman came 'up from the under world.'

'I wonder who it is,' said Guy. 'Not any of the Benmohr people, for they have no time to spare until they come to say good-bye. I should say all the other fellows were too hard at work. It's a chance if Churbett and the D'Oyleys will be ready for a fortnight. He looks like a gentleman. It must be a stranger.'

'It is a gentleman, as you say,' replied Hubert Warleigh, 'and not long from home, by the cut of his jib.'

'How can you tell?' asked Wilfred. 'He is a tall man and has a gun, certainly, which last favours your theory.'

'I see,' said Hubert, 'a valise strapped to the back of his saddle; holsters for pistols, and top-boots. He is a "new chum," safe enough; besides, when he got to the slip-rails, he took the top one down first.'

'You must be right,' said Wilfred, smiling. 'I used to disgrace myself with the slip-rail business. Who in the world can it be? He has come at the wrong time for being shown round, unless he wants an exploring tour.'

The horseman rode up in a leisurely and deliberate fashion; a tall, fresh-complexioned man, whose blue eyes and dark hair reminded Wilfred of many things, and a half-

forgotten clime. The lower part of the stranger's face was concealed by a thick but not fully-grown beard; and as he advanced, with a look of great solemnity, and inquired whether he had the honour to see Mr. Wilfred Effingham, that gentleman, for the life of him, could not remember where he had set eyes upon him before.

'That is my name,' said Wilfred. 'Will you allow us to take your horse, and to say that we are very glad to see you? Guy, take this gentleman's horse to the stable.'

'I thank you kindly. I believe that I have a letter of introduction somewhere to you, sir, from an acquaintance of mine in Ireland—a dissipated, good-for-nothing fellow, one Gerald O'More. I thought it might be as useful in Australia as the writing of a better man.'

'Gerard O'More was a friend of mine,' said Wilfred coldly, with a frown unseen by the stranger, busily engaged in unfastening his multifarious straps and buckles. 'There must be some mistake about the reputation.'

'It's little matter,' said the stranger coolly. 'There's hundreds in Ireland it would suit to the letter, and proud of it they'd be. Maybe it was Tom Ffrench I was thinking of —but it's all as one. It's thinking he was of coming out here himself, the same squireen.'

'I wish to Heaven he had,' said Wilfred, with so hearty an accentuation that the stranger raised his head, apparently struck by the sudden emotion of his tone. 'There is no man living I would as soon see this moment.'

'So this wild counthry hasn't knocked all the heart out of ye, Wilfred, me boy,' said the stranger, holding out his hand, while such a smile rippled over his face as only a son of mirth-loving Erin can produce. 'And so ye didn't know your old chum because he had a trifle of hair on his face, and he coming ten thousand miles to make an afternoon call. I trust the ladies are well this fine weather, and haven't had their bonnets spoiled by the rain lately.'

Wilfred gazed for one moment at the now well-known features, the bright fun-loving eyes, the humorous curves of the lips, and then grasping both hands, shook them till his stalwart visitor rocked again.

'Gerald, old man!' he exclaimed in tones of the wildest astonishment, 'is it you in the flesh? and how in the name

of everything magical did you ever manage to leave green Rathdown and come out to this burned-up land of ours? But you are as welcome as a week's rain—I can't say more than *that*. To think that a beard should have altered your face so! But I had no more thought of seeing you here than our old host of Castle Blake.'

'True for you! What a brick he was! God be with the days we spent there together, Will. Maybe we'll see them again, who knows? Didn't I find my way here like an Indian of the woods? 'Tis a great bushman I'll make, entirely. And, in truth, there's no life would suit me better. An Irishman's a born colonist, half made before he leaves old Ireland. Was that your young brother that I used to make popguns for? What a fine boy he has grown!'

'Yes, that was Guy; he's anxious, like you, to be a bold bushman. Let me introduce my friend Mr. Warleigh, the leader of an expedition we are all bound upon next week.'

'Very glad to meet Mr. Warleigh, I'm sure, and I hope he'll be kind enough to accept me as a supernumerary—cook's mate, or anything in the rough-and-ready line. I'm ready to ship in any kind of craft.'

'You don't mean to say you would like to go with us, Gerald? We are bound for "a dissolute region, inhabited by Turks," as your illustrious countryman expressed it. For Turks read blacks,—in their way just as bad.'

'Pardon me, my dear fellow, for the apparent disrespect; but you don't fancy people come out to this unfurnished territory of yours to amuse themselves? What else did I come for but to work and make money, do you suppose?'

'Now I won't have any explanations till I've shown you to my mother and the girls. How astonished they will be!'

They were certainly astonished. So much so, indeed, that Mr. O'More began to ask why it should be so much more surprising that he came than themselves.

'But we were ruined,' said Annabel, 'and would not have had anything to eat soon, or should have had to go to Boulogne —fancy what horror!'

'And am I, Gerald O'More, such a degenerate Irish gentleman that I can't be ruined as nately and complately as any ancestor that ever frightened a sub-sheriff?' (Here

they all laughed at his serio-comic visage.) 'In sober earnest, I *was* ruined, not entirely by my own fault, but so handily that when the old place was sold there was nothing left over but the lodge at Luggie-law, where you and I used to fish and shoot and drink potheen, Wilfred, in cold evenings.'

'Why not live there, then? I'm sure we were snug enough.'

'Why not?' said O'More—and as he spoke his features assumed a sterner, more elevated expression—'because I wouldn't turn myself into a poor gentleman, with a few hangers-on, and a career contemptibly limited either for good or evil. No! I'd seen many a good fellow, once the genial sportsman and boon companion, change into the lounger and sot. So I packed my gun and personal possessions, put the lodge in my pocket, and here I am, with all the world of Australia before me.'

'A manly resolve,' said Mr. Effingham, 'and I honour you for it, my dear boy, You find us in the midst of a disastrous season, but those who know the land say that the next change must be for the better. You will like all our friends, and enjoy the free life of the bush before you are a month at it. Australia is said, also—though we have not found such to be the case lately—to be an easy country to make money in.'

'So I have found already,' said O'More.

'How?' said everybody in a breath. 'You can't have had any experience in money-making as yet.'

'Indeed have I,' said the newly-arrived one. 'Why, the first day I came to Sydney I bought a half-broke, well-bred colt for a trifle, and as I came through Yass I exchanged him for the horse I am now riding and a ten-pound note.'

'What a wonderful new chum you must be!' said Guy impulsively. 'I've heard of lots that lost nearly all the cash they had the first month, but never of one who made any. You will be as rich as Mr. Rockley soon.'

'Amateur horse-dealing doesn't always turn out so well. But I always buy a good horse when I see him. I shall get infatuated about this country; it suits me down to the ground.'

The evening was passed in universal hilarity. Mr. O'More's spirits appeared to rise in the inverse proportion to the distance

which separated him from the Green Isle. Every one was delighted with his *naïveté* and resolves to do great things in the way of exploration. The expedition he regarded as an entertainment for his special benefit, declaring that if it had not been finally settled he would have got one up on his own account.

As good luck would have it, the Benmohr cattle escaped from the mustering paddock after they had been collected, and having 'made back' to fastnesses, which they had been permitted to occupy in consideration of the season, took some days in recapturing. So that yet another week of respite, to everybody's expressed disgust but secret relief, was granted. Besides, Fred Churbett was not quite ready—he seldom was—and the D'Oyleys were just as well pleased to scrape up a few more of their outliers. There remained then 'a little season of love and laughter' for Mr. Gerald O'More to utilise in improving the acquaintance.

And he was just the man to do this. He won old Dick's good-will by the hearty energy with which he threw himself into the small labours which, of course—for who ever knew an overland journey quite provided for, or a ship's cargo stowed away, on the appointed day of its departure?—remained to be got through. He had devoted himself *en amateur* to the duties of third mate on the voyage out, and, being a yachtsman of experience, entitled himself to the possession of a certificate, should he ever require, as he thought seriously was on the cards, to work his way home. In matters connected with ropes and fastenings he showed an easy superiority. Sailors are proverbially the most valued hands in Australia, from their aptitude to make the best kind of bushmen. Their adaptiveness to every kind of labour, grounded on the need for putting out their strength at the orders of a despotic superior, is a fine training for bush life. Having nautical tendencies superadded to recent experiences, Gerald O'More fulfilled these conditions, and was rated accordingly.

'He's the makings of a fust-rate settler, that young gentleman is,' said Dick Evans. 'He's a man all over, and can ketch hold anywhere. He's got that pluck and bottom as he don't know his own strength.'

His exuberant spirits by no means exhausted themselves during the labour of the day, when in check shirt and A.B.

rig he was in the forefront of the drafting, branding, loading, or packing which still went on. In the evening, after a careful toilette, he was equally tireless in his society duties, and kept all the lady part of the family entertained by his varied conversation, his songs, jokes, and tales of many lands. He struck up a great alliance with Annabel, who declared that he was a delightful creature, specially sent by Providence to raise their spirits in this trying hour.

It was well enough to talk lightly of the Great Expedition, but as the day approached for the actual setting out of the Crusade, deep gloom settled upon the inmates of The Chase.

Wilfred Effingham had never before quitted home upon any more danger-seeming journey than a continental trip or a run over to Ireland. He was passionately devoted to his mother and sisters, whom at that period of his life he regarded as the chief repositories, not only of all the virtues, but of all the 'fine shades' of the higher feminine character. By no means deficient of natural admiration for the unrelated daughters of Eve, he regarded his sisters with a love such as only that relation can furnish. With them he was ever thoughtful, fond, and chivalrous. For their comfort and advantage he was capable of any sacrifice. Rosamond, nearest to him in age, had been from childhood his close companion, and for her he would have laid down his life. These feelings were reciprocated to the fullest extent.

And now he was going away—the dutiful son, the fond brother, the kindly, cheerful companion—away on a hazardous journey into an unknown, barbarous region, exposed to the dangers of Australian forest wayfaring. Guy, too, was on the march—the frank, fearless boy, idolised, as is the younger son ofttimes, with the boundless love with which the mother strains the babe to her bosom.

> He was the last of all, yet none
> O'er his lone grave may weep.

He was not the *very* last, Selden and Blanche coming after, as was pointed out to Mrs. Effingham, when her tears flowed at Selden's accidental quotation from 'The Graves of a Household,' for these lines referred to one beneath the lone, lone sea, and even in the recesses of the bushland mourning over his grave would be possible.

'Oh, my darling,' said the tender mother, 'do not jest on such a subject. How could I live were either of you to die in the wilderness? Why did this terrible season come to rob me of my sons? But promise me, promise me, both of you, as you love your mother, not to run unnecessary risks. Danger, ah me! I know there must be, but you will think of your poor mother, and of your father and sisters, and not needlessly court danger. Guy, you *will* promise me?'

'Don't be so frightened, mother,' said the younger son. 'I won't go running after risks and dangers. Why, it's ten to one nobody gets hurt. There are only blacks; and there's no water to drown us, that's one consolation.'

When did generous youth perceive the possibility of danger until forced upon him by sudden stroke of fate? 'Whom the gods love die young' is true in one sense, inasmuch as they escape the melancholy anticipations which cloud the joys of maturer life. For them trains never collide, nor coaches upset; sword-strokes are parried, and bullets go wide; ships founder not; disease is only for the feeble; they are but the old who die!'

Wilfred more truly understood the matron's tender dread, and her reasons.

'Don't fret, my darling mother,' he said as he clasped her hand, 'I'll look after Guy. You know he obeys me cheerfully, so far; and you know I am pretty careful. I will see he does nothing rash, and he will be always under my eye.'

'Remember, dear, I trust him to you,' said Mrs. Effingham, returning her son's fond clasp, but not wholly reassured, being of the opinion that what Wilfred considered careful avoidance of danger other people characterised as unflinching though not impetuous determination to get through or over any given obstacle.

. . . . . .

Off at last! The tearful breakfast is over. The long string of cattle has poured out of the mustering paddock gates, followed by Hubert Warleigh, with Duncan Cargill and Selden, who were permitted to help drive during the first stage; Mr. O'More, in cords and top-boots, with a hunting-crop in his hand, wisely declining a stock-whip for the present. His horse bears a cavalry headstall bridle, with a sliding bridoon rein—'handy for feeding purposes,' he says. He

has yet to learn that, after a week's cattle-driving, most horses may be trusted to graze with the reins beneath their feet, which they will by no means tread upon or run off with.

A couple of brown-faced youngsters, natives of Yass, have been hired, as road hands and to be generally useful, for the term of one year. These young persons are grave and silent of demeanour; have been 'among cattle' all their lives, and no exception can be taken to their horsemanship. They afford an endless fund of amusement to O'More, who forces them into conversation on various topics, and tries to imitate their soft-voiced, drawling monotone.

Dick Evans drives the horse-dray, destined to go no farther than the Snowy River, after which the camp equipment will be carried on pack-horses, the road being closed to wheels. They are now being driven with the cattle, accoutred with their pack-saddles and light loads to accustom them to the exercise.

Dick has had a characteristic parting with Mrs. Evans, who saw him prepare to depart without outward show of emotion.

'Now mind you behave yourself, Evans, while you're away, and don't be running off to New Zealand, or the Islands, or anywheres.'

'All right, old woman,' said Dick, cracking his whip. 'You'll be so precious fond of me when I come back that we shan't have a row for a year afterwards.'

'No fear; not if you was to stop away five year!' retorted his spouse, with decision. 'Take care as I don't marry again afore you come back, if you hang it out too long.'

'Marry away and don't mind me, old woman,' returned the philosophical Dick; '*I* shan't interfere with the pore feller. Leave us the old mare, that's all. A good 'oss, that you can't put wrong in saddle or harness, ain't met with every day.'

Here Mrs. Evans, seeing a smile on the faces of the listeners, began to think she was occupying an undignified position. Putting her apron to her eyes, with a feeble effort at wiping a few tears away, she solemnly told her incorrigible mate that she hoped God would change the wicked old heart of him, as wasn't thankful for a good wife, as had cooked and worked for him, and been dragged about the country all these

years, and now to be told she was worse than a brute beast! Here *real* tears came.

'The mare can hold her tongue, at any rate,' quoth Dick; 'and where's the woman you can say as much of, barrin' Mrs. Wilson of Ours, as was born deaf and dumb? But come, I didn't mean to fret ye, and me on the march. Give us a buss, old woman! Now we part all reg'lar and military like. You know women's not allowed with the rigiment in war time. Mind you take care of the missus and the young ladies, and keep a civil tongue in your head.'

With this farewell exhortation and reconciliation Dick shook off his spouse, and walked briskly away by the side of the team. The cattle, glad to feel themselves unchecked, struck briskly along the track. Wilfred and Guy came up at a hand-gallop, and took their places behind the drove. The first act of the migratory drama was commenced, with all the actors in their places.

The first day's stage was arranged to reach only to a stock-yard near Benmohr. It was a longish day's drive, but, being the first day from home, all the more likely to steady the cattle. Having got so far, and secured them inside the rails, with Dick and his team camped by the dam, Wilfred left Guy in charge and rode over, with O'More and Hubert Warleigh, to spend a last civilised evening at Benmohr. It was necessary for the latter, now recognised as the responsible leader of the expedition, to give Argyll, Hamilton, and the others instructions as to the route.

A fair-sized party was assembled around that hospitable board. All the men present had been actuated by the same feelings, apparently, as themselves, viz. with a trustworthy person in charge of the camp, they might as well enjoy themselves once more at dear, jolly, old Benmohr.

'Hech! sae ye're here to look at a body ance mair, Maister Effingham; and whatten garred you to list Maister O'More, and him juist frae hame, puir laddie, to gang awa' and be killed by thae wild blacks?'

'I suppose you wouldn't mind *my* being rubbed out, Mrs. Teviot,' said Hubert. 'It's only gentlemen from England that are valuable. Imported stock, eh?'

'Noo, Maister Hubert, ye ken weel I wad be wae eneugh if onything happened to yer ain sell, though ye hae

nae mither to greet for ye, mair's the peety, puir lady! But your hands can aye keep your heed; and they say ye can haud ane o' thae narrow shields and throw a spear as weel's ony o' the blacks. They'll no catch *you* napping; but this young gentleman will maybe rin into ambushes and sic-like, like a bird into the net o' the fowler.'

'Then we must pull him out again,' said Hubert gravely. 'I hope you are not going to be rash, Mr. O'More. See how you will be missed.'

'I am aware, as I have not had the good fortune to live much in Australia,' said Gerald, 'that I must be made of sugar or salt, warranted to melt at the first wetting. But my hands have kept my head in an Irish fair, before now; and I think half-a-dozen shillelahs at once must be nearly as bad as a blackfellow's club.'

'They are deuced quick with the boomerang and nullah,' said Hubert; 'you can hardly see the cursed things before they are on to you.'

'And a barbed spear is worse than all the blackthorns in Tipperary,' said Wilfred; 'so look out and don't cast a gloom over the party by your early death. Mrs. Teviot, give me a parting kiss and your blessing, for that *is* the dinner-bell.'

'Maister Effingham!' said the old dame, in accents of such unfeigned surprise and disapproval that all three men burst out laughing. 'Eh, ye're jist laughin' at the auld woman, ye bad laddie; but ye ken weel that ye hae my blessing; and may the mercy and guidance o' the Lord God of Israel bring ye a' safe hame to your freends and relations—my gentlemen and a', as I'm prayin' for't—and a bonnie day it will be when we see ye a' back again—no forgetten that daft Neil Barrington, that gies me as muckle trouble as the hail o' ye pitten thegither.'

At the conclusion of this farewell ceremony with Mrs. Teviot, who indeed took a most maternal interest in the whole company, they hied themselves at once to the dining-room.

'So you are to join our party, Mr. O'More?' said Hamilton. 'You could not have come at a better time to understand our bush life.'

'Awfully glad of the chance, I assure you,' said that gentleman. 'It was the hope of something of the sort that brought me out. If this affair had not been on, I should have

fancied I had been induced to come to a new country under false pretences.'

'Why so?' asked Forbes.

'Because you are all so unpardonably civilised. I expected to sit upon wooden stools and eat biscuits and beef, to sleep in the open air, and to be returning fire with my pistols as I came up from the wharf. Instead of which (I will take turkey, if you please) I find myself here, at The Chase, and half-a-dozen other houses in the lap of luxury.'

'Oh, come!' said Forbes deprecatingly, 'are you not flavouring the compliment a little too strongly?'

'I think Mr. O'More comes from the Emerald Isle,' said Ardmillan. 'May I ask if you have ever kissed the Blarney stone?'

'Of course; all Irishmen make a point of it. It abates their naturally severe tendencies. But joking apart, all you people live as well as most of us in the old country. Wilfred here can bear me out. If claret was a little more fashionable, I don't see a pin to choose.'

'There will be a change of fare when we're on the road,' said Fred Churbett. 'Who knows when we shall see pale ale again? The thought is anguish; and those confounded pack-horses carry so little.'

'But think of the way we shall enjoy club breakfasts, clean shirts, evening parties, and all that, when we *do* get back,' said Neil Barrington. 'We shall be like sailors after a three years' cruise. I must say I always envied *them*.'

'I think, if the company is unanimous,' said Hamilton, 'that we might as well have a serious talk about the route. Captain Warleigh, as we must now call him, will be off early to-morrow, so the greater reason for proceeding to business.'

'I was going to remind you all,' said Hubert, 'that we ought to agree about our plans. It's plain sailing across Monaro, though the feed is bad until we come to the Snowy River. Of course, we all go on to-morrow.'

'Which way?' asked Hamilton.

'Past Bungendore, Queanbeyan, and Micalago. We cross the Bredbo and the Eumeralla higher up, and go by the Jew's flat, and Coolamatong.'

'We shall follow in a couple of days,' said Argyll.

'And I in three,' said Forbes.

'You needn't follow in a string, unless you like,' said their guide; 'the feed will be cut up if one mob after the other goes over it. All the stock-riders hereabouts know the Monaro country, so you can travel either right or left of me, as long as you fetch up at Buckley's Crossing, of the Snowy River.'

'What sort of a ford is it?' inquired one of the D'Oyleys.

'It's always a swim with the Snowy,' said the captain, 'summer and winter, and a cold one too, as I can witness. But the grass is better, though rough, after you cross, and we have an old acquaintance waiting there to join the party. He knows the country well.'

'Who the deuce is he?' said Argyll. 'We shall be well off for guides.'

'Not more than you will want, perhaps,' said the leader. 'We're not over Wahgulmerang yet. But the man is old Tom Glendinning—and a better bushman never saddled a horse. He has been living for some time at one of the farthest out stations, Ingebyra, and wants to join us. He asked me not to mention his name till we had actually started.'

'So,' said Wilfred reflectively, 'the old fellow is determined to make his latter days adventurous. I see no objection, do you, Argyll? He and his history will be probably buried among the forests of this new country we are going to explore.'

'It cannot matter in any way,' answered Argyll. 'He will, as you say, most likely never return to this locality.'

'Many of the old hands have histories, if it comes to that,' said Hubert, 'and very queer ones too. But they have paid the price for their sins, and old Tom won't have time to commit many more—if shooting an odd blackfellow or two doesn't count.'

'Have we any more general instructions to receive?' inquired Hamilton, who was, perhaps, the most practical-minded of the party.

'Only these: we must all be well armed. Pistols are handy, and a rifle or a double barrel is necessary for every man of the party. We *may* have no fighting to do; but blacks are plentiful, big fellows, and fierce too. We must be able to defend ourselves and more, or not a man will come back alive. After we cross the Snowy River, I shall halt till you all come up; then we can join the smaller mobs of

cattle, so as to be close together in case of trouble. Everything will have to be packed from the Snowy ; so it will be as well not to take more than is required.'

'You are fully prepared for all the privations of the road, Mr. O'More ?' asked Argyll. 'They may strike you as severe after your late life at headquarters.'

'That is the very reason, my dear fellow. You surely haven't forgotten that when you were at home you fancied all Australian life to be transacted in the wilderness. I expected the wilderness ; I demand the desert. With anything short of the wildest waste I shall be disappointed.'

'That's the way to take it,' said Fred Churbett. 'I had all those feelings myself when I arrived, but I was betrayed into comfort when I bought The She-oaks, and have hardly gone nearer to roughing it than a trip to the Tumut for store cattle.'

There was a laugh at this, Fred's tendency to comfort being proverbial ; though, to do him justice, he was capable of considerable exertion when roused and set going.

'Is this Eldorado of yours near the coast, Warleigh ?' inquired Forbes. 'If so, there will be sure to be good agricultural land, and some kind of a township will spring up.'

'I believe there's a passage from the lakes to the sea, near which would be a grand site for a township. I hadn't time to look it out. It gave me all I knew to get back.'

'What does any one want a town for ?' growled Argyll. 'Next thing, people will be talking about *farms*. Enough to make one ill. Are we going to risk our lives and shed our blood, possibly, for the benefit of storekeepers and farmers, to spoil the runs after we have won them ?'

'Don't be so insanely conservative, Argyll,' said Forbes. 'Even a farmer is a man and a brother. We shall want some one to buy our raw products and import stores. We might as well give Rockley the office if we found a settlement. *He* would do us no harm.'

Here there was a chorus of approbation.

'Of course I except Rockley—as good a fellow as ever lived. But he holds peculiar views upon the land question, and might induce others to come over on that confounded farming pretence, which is the ruin of Australia.'

'The country I can show you, if we reach it, is large

enough to hold all your stock and their increase for the next twenty years, with half-a-dozen towns as big as Yass.'

'If this be the case, the sooner we get there the better,' said Hamilton. 'You start in earnest to-morrow, and we shall follow the day after. I shall keep nearly parallel with you. Ardmillan comes next, then Churbett, lastly the D'Oyleys. We shall be the largest party, as to stock, men, and horses, that has gone out for many a day.'

'All the more reason why we should make our mark,' said O'More. 'I wouldn't have missed it for five hundred pounds. I might have stayed in Ireland for a century without anything of the kind happening. I feel like Raymond of Antioch, or Godfrey of Bouillon. I suppose we shan't meet to drink success to the undertaking every night.'

'This is the last night we shall have *that* opportunity,' said Argyll. 'Here come the toddy tumblers. The night is chilly, but it will be more so next week, when we are on watch or lying under canvas in a teetotal camp.'

'We can always manage a good fire, unless we are in blacks' country,' said Hubert; 'that is one comfort; there's any amount of timber; and you can keep yourselves jolly in a long night by carrying firewood.'

Long before daylight Hubert Warleigh arose and awakened Wilfred. Their horses had been placed so as to be easily procurable, and no delay took place. The stars were in the sky. A faint, clear line in the east yet told of the coming dawn, as the friends rode forth from Benmohr gate and took the track to the scene of the last night's camp.

When they reached the spot the sun had risen, and no one was on the ground but Dick Evans, who was in a leisurely way packing up the camp equipage, including the tent and cooking utensils.

'Here's the breakfast, Mr. Wilfred,' he said cheerily; 'the cattle's on ahead. I kept back the corned beef, and here's bread and a billy of tea. You can go to work, while I finish packing. I'll catch up easy by dinner-time, though the cattle's sure to rip along the first few days.'

'This is a grand institution,' said Gerald. 'I wouldn't say a toothful of whisky would be out of place, and the air so fresh; but sure "I feel as if I could lape over a house this minute," as I heard a Connemara parlour-maid say once.'

'Nothing is more appetising,' said Wilfred, 'than a genuine Australian bush meal. A slice or two of meat, a slice of fresh damper, and a pot of tea. You may travel on it from one end of the continent to another.'

'He was a great man that invented that same,' said O'More. 'Would there be a little more tay in the canteen? Beef and bread his unaided intellect might have compassed; but the tay, even to think of that same in the middle of the meal, required inspiration. When ye think of the portableness of it too. It was a great idea entirely!'

'Bushmen take it morning, noon, and night,' said Warleigh. 'The doctors say it's not good for us—gives us heartburn, and so on. But if any one will go bail for a man who drinks brandy and water, I'd stand the risk on tea.'

'So I suspect. Even whisky, they do say, gets into the head sometimes. I suppose you never knew a man to kill his wife, or burn his house, or lame his child for life, *under the influence of tay?*'

An hour's riding brought them to the cattle, which had just been permitted 'to spread out on a bit of rough feed,' as the young man at the side next them expressed it. A marshy creek flat had still remaining an array of ragged tussocks and rushy growths, uninviting in ordinary seasons, but now welcome to the hungry cattle. They found Guy sitting on his horse in a leisurely manner, and keeping a sharp look-out on the cattle.

'What sort of a night had you?' said Wilfred. 'Were they contented?'

'Oh, pretty fair. They roared and walked round at first; then they all lay down and took it easy. Old Dick roused us out and gave us our breakfast before dawn. We had the horses hobbled short, and were on the road with the first streak of light. This is the first stop we have made.'

'That's the way,' said Hubert. 'Nothing like an early start; it gives the cattle all the better chance. Some of these are very low in condition. When we get over the Snowy, they'll do better.'

'Shall we have a regular camp to-night,' asked Guy, 'and watch the cattle?'

'Of course,' said Hubert; 'no more yarding. It is the right thing after the first day from home.'

'And how long will the watches be?' asked Guy, with some interest. 'If I sleep as soundly as I did last night, I shan't be much good.'

'Oh, you'll soon come to your work. Boys always sleep sound at first, but you'll be able to do your four hours without winking before we've been a week on the road.'

The ordinary cattle-droving life and times ensued from this stage forward. They passed by degrees through the wooded, hilly country which lies between Yass and Queanbeyan, all of which was so entirely denuded of grass as to be tolerably uninteresting.

By day the work was tedious and monotonous, as the hungry cattle were difficult to drive, and the scanty pasture rendered it necessary to take advantage of every possible excuse for saving them fatigue.

At night matters were more cheerful. After dark, when the cattle were hemmed in—they were tired enough to rest peacefully—Guy had many a pleasant talk by the glowing watch-fires. This entertainment came, after enjoying the evening meal, with a zest which only youth and open-air journeying combined can furnish.

As for Gerald O'More, he examined and praised and enjoyed everything. He liked the long, slow, apparently aimless day's travel, the bivouac of the night, the humours of the drovers. He 'foregathered' with all kinds of queer people who visited the camp, and learned their histories. He felt much disappointed that there were no wild beasts except the native dog and native bear (koala), neither of which had sufficient confidence in themselves to assume the offensive.

The next week was one of sufficient activity to satisfy all the ardent spirits of the party. In the first place, the cattle had to be driven across the river, the which they resisted with great vehemence, never before having seen a stream of the same magnitude. However, by the aid of an unlimited quantity of whip-cracking, dogging, yelling, and shouting, the stronger division of the herd was forced and hustled into the deep, swift current. Here they bravely struck out for the opposite side, and in a swaying, serpentine line, followed by the weaker cattle, struggled with the current until they reached and safely ascended the farther bank.

CHAPTER XXII

INJUN SIGN

HAVING crossed their Rubicon, and being fairly committed to the task of exploration, a provisional halt was called, and arrangement for further progress made. One by one the other drovers arrived, and having successively swum the river, guarded or 'tailed' their cattle until the plan of campaign was fully matured.

Duncan Cargill was sent back with the team. The contents of the waggon, which, in view of this stage, had been economised as to weight, were distributed among the pack-saddles. Such apportionment also took place among the other encampments. Dick Evans as usual distinguished himself by the neat and complete manner in which he arranged his packs.

Wheeled carriages being impossible because of the nature of the country, it is obvious that nothing but the barest necessaries can be conveyed — flour, tea, sugar, camp-kettles large enough to boil beef, billy-cans, frying-pans, quart-pots, axes, and the ruder tools, with the blankets of the party, are all that can be permitted. Meat—indifferent as to quality, but wholesome and edible—they had with them. Each man carried his gun, on the chance of a sudden attack by blacks. It would be obviously unreasonable to ask the enemy to wait until the pack-horses came up, even supposing that guns could be safely carried in that fashion. So each man rode with his piece slung carbine-fashion, and if he had such weapon, his pistols in the holsters of the period.

Reasonable-sized, but by no means luxurious, tents were carried, in which those who were off watch could repose, also

as shelter against rain, if such a natural phenomenon should ever again occur in Australia.

A few days sufficed to make all necessary arrangements, during which Hubert Warleigh's prompt decisions extorted universal respect.

'The country is partly open, as you see, for another hundred miles,' said he, 'but after that, turns very thick and mountainous. The Myalls will soon be on our tracks, and may go for us any time. What we have to do, is to be ready to show fight with all the men we can spare. The feed's mending as we go on.'

'Certainly it is,' said Hamilton. 'Our cattle are fresher than they were a week since.'

'My idea is to box the cattle into larger mobs, which will give us more men to handle if we fight. We can draft them by their brands when we get to the open country. The driving will be much the same and the men less scattered about.'

'A good proposal,' said Argyll. 'It will be more sociable, and, as you say, safer in case of a surprise. But are you certain of an attack? Will all these precautions be necessary?'

'I know more of the Myall blacks of this country than most men,' said Warleigh gravely. 'You see, we are going among strong tribes, with any amount of fighting men. Big, well-fed fellows too, and fiercer the farther you go south.'

'How do you account for that?'

'The cold climate does it and the living. Fish and game no end. It's a rich country and no mistake. When you see it, you won't wonder at their standing a brush to keep it.'

'What infernal nonsense!' said Argyll. 'Just as if the brutes wouldn't be benefited by our occupation.'

'They won't look at it in that light, I'm afraid,' said Fred Churbett. 'History tells us that all hill-tribes have exhibited a want of amiability to the civilised lowland races. In Scotland, I believe, to this day, the descendants of a rude sub-variety of man pride themselves upon dissimilarity of dress and manners.'

'What!' shouted Argyll, 'do you compare my noble Highland ancestors with these savages, or the lowland plebeians who usurped our rights? As well compare the Norman noble with the grocer of Cheapside. Why——'

'May not we leave the settlement of this question till we are more settled ourselves?' said Wilfred. 'Our present duty is to be prepared for our Australian Highlanders, who, as Warleigh knows, have a pretty taste for ambuscades and surprises.'

It was decided that Wilfred and the Benmohr men should mix their cattle and take the lead, followed by Churbett and the D'Oyleys, which, with Ardmillan's and Neil's, would make three large but not unwieldy droves. It must be borne in mind that five hundred head of cattle was considered a large number in those primitive times, and that, although the road was rough and the country mountainous, the added number of stock-riders which the co-operative system permitted gave great advantages in droving.

Fred Churbett and Gerald O'More struck up a great intimacy, dissimilar as they were in temperament and constitutional bias. The unflagging spirits and ever-bubbling mirth of the Milesian were a constant source of amusement to the observant humorist, while Fred's tales of Australian life were eagerly listened to by the enthusiastic novice.

For days they kept the track which led from one border station to another, finding no alteration from their previous experience of wayfaring. But one evening they reached a spot where a dense and apparently interminable forest met, like a wall, the open down which they had been traversing. 'Here's Wargungo-berrimul,' said Hubert Warleigh, 'the last settled place for many a day. We strike due south now, towards that mountain peak far in the distance. A hundred miles beyond that lies the country that is to make all our fortunes.'

'Wasn't it here old Tom Glendinning was to join us?' said Wilfred.

'Yes; it was here I picked up the old fellow as I came back, with my clothes torn off my back, and very little in my belly either. He swore he would be ready, and he is not the man to fail in a thing of this sort. By Jove! here the old fellow comes.'

A man on a grey horse came down the track which led from the station huts to the deep, sluggish-looking creek. Such a watercourse often follows the windings of the outer edge of a forest, defining the geological formations with curious fidelity.

A few minutes brought the withered features of the ancient stock-rider into full view. He looked years older, and his eyes seemed unnaturally bright. His figure was bowed and shrunken since they had seen him last, but he still reined the indomitable Boney with a firm bridle-hand; and not only did Crab follow him, but two large kangaroo dogs, red and brindled as to colour, followed at his horse's heels.

'My sarvice to ye, Mr. Wilfred,' he said, touching his hat with a gesture of old days. 'So ye were bet out of Lake William and the Yass country at last. Well, 'tis a grand place ye're bound for now. To thim that gits there, it's a fortune—divil a less!'

'Very glad to have you again, Tom. I hope the country will bear out its character. What a fine pair of dogs you have there!'

''Tis thrue for ye, Master Wilfred; they're fast and savage divils—never choked a dingo. 'Tis little they care what they go at, from a bull to a bandicoot, and they'd tear the throat out of a blackfellow, all the same as an old-man kangaroo.'

'Formidable animals, indeed,' said Wilfred. 'Gerald, here are a couple of dogs warranted to fight like the blood-hounds of Ponce de Leon.'

'The situation is becoming dramatic,' said O'More. 'I shouldn't mind seeing the wild man of the woods coursed by these fellows, if we could be up in time to stave off the kill. But what splendid dogs they are! taller and more muscular than the home greyhounds, with tremendous chests and shoulders—very fine drawn too. They must have a cross that I don't know of.'

'Thrue for you, sir. I heard tell that their mother—a great slut entirely—came from a strain of Indian dogs that was brought to Ingebyra by the ould say-captain that took it up. He said it was tigers they hunted in India.'

'Polygar dogs, probably,' said Wilfred. 'There is a fierce breed of that name used by the Indian princes; the packs, in their wild state, worry a tiger now and then. However that may be, they are fine fellows. How did you get them, Tom?'

The old man attempted a humorous chuckle as he replied:

'Sure, didn't they nearly ate the super himself last week,

and him comin' in on foot after dark, by raison that his horse knocked up at the four-mile creek. "Tom," he says, "as you're goin' out to this new country, you can take them two infernal savages with you. I'd a good mind to shoot the pair of them. But the blacks will likely kill the lot of you, so it will save me the trouble." "All right," says I, "my sarvice to ye, sir. Maybe we'll show the warrigals a taste of sport before they have the atin' of us." So here we are—ould Tom Glendinning, Boney and Crab, Smoker and Spanker—horse, fut, and dthragoons. 'Tis my last bit of overlanding, I'm thinkin'. But I'd like to help ye to a good run before I go, Mr. Wilfred, and lay me bones where ye'd have a kind word and a look now and agen at the grave of ould hunstman Tom.'

The camp was always early astir. The later watchers took good care to arouse the rest of the party at the first streak of dawn. Dick Evans and Tom were by that time enjoying an early smoke. Hubert Warleigh, tireless and indefatigable, needed no arousing. In virtue of his high office, he was absolved from a special watch, as more advantageously employed in general supervision of the party.

Argyll, wonderful to relate—

> Whose soul could scantly brook,
> E'en from his King a haughty look,

was so impressed by the woodcraft of this grand-looking, sad-voiced bushman, that to the wild astonishment of his friends he actually submitted to hear his opinions confuted.

As they plunged into the sombre trackless forest, where the tall iron-bark trees, with fire-blackened stems, stood ranked in endless colonnades, they seemed to be entirely at the mercy of their lately-gained acquaintance. He it was who rode ever in the forefront, so that the horsemen on the right and left 'lead' could with ease direct their droves in his track. He it was who decided which of two apparently similar precipices would prove to be the 'leading range,' eventually landing the party upon a grassy plateau, and not in a horrible craggy defile. He it was who gauged to a quarter of an hour the time for grazing, and so reaching a favourable corner in time to camp. He saw the pack-saddles properly loaded, apportioned the spare horses, and com-

manded saddle-stuffing. Did a tired youngster feel overcome by the desire of sleep, so strong in the lightly-laden brain of youth, allowing his side of the drove to 'draw out,' he was often surprised on waking to see them returning with a dark form pacing silently behind them. Did a tricky stock-rider—for they were not all models of Spartan virtue—essay to shirk his just share of work, he found a watchful eye upon him, and perhaps heard a reminder, couched in the easily comprehended language of 'the droving days.'

Before they had been a week on the new division of their journey, every one was fain to remark these qualities in their leader.

'I say, Argyll,' said Fred Churbett, who, with Ardmillan and Neil Barrington, had ridden forward from the rearguard, leaving it to the easy task of following the broad trail of the leading herd, 'how about going anywhere with that compass of yours? Could you steer us as Warleigh does through this iron-bark wilderness?'

'I am free to confess, Fred, that it does good occasionally to have the conceit taken out of one. You must admit, however, that he has been over the ground before. Still, he seems to have a kind of instinct about the true course when neither sun nor landmarks are available, which travellers assert only savages possess. You remember that dull, foggy day? He had been away only an hour when he said we were making a half-circle, and so it proved.'

'And the confounded scrub was so thick,' said Ardmillan, 'that I tore the clothes off my back hunting up a pack-horse. But for the tracks, I knew no more than the dead where I was.'

'This half-savage life he has lived has developed those instincts,' said Churbett. 'He could do a little scalping when his blood was up, I believe. I saw him look at that cheeky ruffian Jonathan as if he had a good mind to break his neck. Pity he missed the education of a gentleman.'

'He is ignorant, of course, poor chap, from no fault of his own,' said Argyll; 'but he is not to be called vulgar either. Blood is a great, a tremendous thing; though he doesn't know enough for a sergeant of dragoons, yet there is a grand unconsciousness in his bearing and a natural air of

authority now that he is our commanding officer, which he derives from his family descent.'

That night they reached the base of a vast range, which, on the morrow, they were forced to ascend; afterwards, still more difficult, to descend. This meant flogging the reluctant cattle every step of the downward, dangerous track. Above them towered the mountain; below them the precipice, stark and sheer, three hundred feet to the granite boulders over which the foaming Snowy rolled its turbulent course to the iron-bound coast of a lonely sea.

Mr. Churbett and others of the party had a grievance against Destiny, as having forced them from their pleasant homes to roam this trackless wild, but no such accusation was heard from the lips of Gerald O'More. His spirits were at the highest possible pitch. Everything was new, rare, and delightful. The early rising was splendid, the droving full of enjoyment, the scenery enthralling, the watching romantic, the shooting splendid, the society characteristic. He made friends with all the men of the party, but the chosen of his heart was old Tom, who discovered that O'More had known of his old patron in Mayo. He thereupon conceived a strong liking and admiration for him, as a 'rale gintleman from the ould counthry.'

Daily the old man recounted legends of the early days of colonial life, and instructed him in the lore of the sportsmen of the land. So when the cattle were 'drawing along' quietly, or feeding under strict guardianship, Tom and he would slip off with the dogs, which generally resulted in a kangaroo tail baked in the ashes for the evening meal, a brush turkey, or a savoury dish of 'wallaby steamer' for the morning's breakfast.

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Wilfred's watch was ended. He was anxious enough to find his couch in the tent, where he could throw himself down and pass instantly into the dreamless sleep which comes so swiftly to the watcher. But he saw their leader move off on his round, with his usual stately stride, as if sleep and rest were superfluous luxuries.

The morn arose, tranquil, balm-breathing, glorious. As the cattle followed the course of a stream through the still,

trackless forest, a feeling of relief, amounting to exhilaration, pervaded the whole party. It was generally known that the outskirts of the wilderness would be reached that evening—that ere another day closed they might have a glimpse of the long-sought land of promise.

Every one's wardrobe was in a dilapidated and unsatisfactory condition. The horses were jaded, the cattle leg-weary, the men tired out, with the dismal monotony of the wilderness.

The stage of this day was unusually short; indeed, not above half of the usual distance. The leader, Hubert, wished the rearguard to close up, in case of accidents. In the event of a surprise, they must have their whole available force within call.

As is customary, there were dissentients. 'Why lose half a stage?' 'Why not send a scout forward? The wild men of the woods might, after all, be peaceably inclined.' This last suggestion was Argyll's, who, always impatient, could with difficulty brook the slow, daily advance of the leading drove. The impetuous Highlander, who had not hitherto had experience of hand-to-hand fighting with the wild tribes of the land, was inclined to undervalue the danger of an attack upon a well-armed party.

But Hubert Warleigh, in this juncture, showed that he was not disposed to surrender his rights as a duly appointed leader. 'I am sorry we don't agree,' he said; 'but I take my own way until we reach the open country. As to the blacks, no man can say I was ever afraid of them (or of anything else, for that matter), only I know their ways. You don't, of course, and I think it the right thing to be well prepared. Old Tom saw a heavy lot of tracks yesterday—all of fighting men too, not a gin or a picaninny among them. He didn't like the look of it. We must camp as close as we can to-night, and keep a bright look-out, or Faithfull's men won't be all they'll have to brag about.'

Argyll thought these were groundless fears; that they were losing time by remaining in this hopeless wilderness longer than was necessary. But he was outvoted by the others.

Meanwhile the first drove, after having been fed until sundown, was camped in a bend of the sedgy creek, and the usual watch-fires lighted. This spot was peculiarly suitable, inasmuch as the long line of an outcrop of volcanic trap,

which ran transversely to the little watercourse, closed one side of the half-circle. This was not, of course, an actual fence, but being composed of stone slabs and enormous boulders, did not invite clambering on by the footsore cattle.

The other contingent was camped a short distance in the rear, in an angle of the lava country, also thickly timbered.

With the lighting of the watch-fires and the routine attention to the ordinary duties of the camp, a more tranquil spirit pervaded the party. Argyll's impatience had subsided, and, with his usual generosity, he had taken upon himself the task of making the round of the camps, and seeing that the order as to each man having his firearms ready, with a supply of cartridges, was carried out. Fred Churbett grumbled a good deal at having to take all this trouble for invisible or problematical savages.

'By me sowl, thin, Mr. Churbett,' said old Tom, 'if ye had one of their reed spears stickin' into ye for half a day, as I had wanst, you'ld never need twice tellin' to have yer gun ready, like me, night and day. 'Tis the likes of me knows them, and if it wasn't for Gyp Warleigh, it's little chance some of yees 'ud have to see yer friends agin.'

'Don't you think he's frightening us all?' said Gerald O'More, with a careless laugh. 'They must be wonderful fellows, by all accounts. They have no bows and arrows, not even wooden swords, like Robinson Crusoe's savages. Surely they don't hit often with these clumsy spears of theirs. Warleigh's anxiety is telling upon his nerves.'

Old Tom glared wrathfully into the speaker's eyes for a little space before he answered; when he did, there was an air of bitter disdain, rarely employed by the old man in his intercourse with gentlemen.

'Sure ye don't know the man, nor the craytures yer spakin' about, half as well as ould Crab there. Why would ye, indade, and ye jist out of the ship and with the cry of the Castle Blake hounds still in yer ears. It's yerself that will make the fine bushman and tip-top settler in time, but yer spoilin' yerself, sir, talkin' that way about the best bushman between this and Swan River, I don't care where the other is. Take care of *yerself* then, Mr. O'More, when the spears begin flyin', and don't get separated from the party, by no manner of manes.'

'You may depend upon me, Tom,' said O'More, with a good-humour that nothing was apparently able to shake. 'My hands were taught to keep my head. I have been in worse places than this.'

'Bedad, if ye seen a blackfellow steadyin' his womrah to let ye have a spear at fifty yards, or comin' like a flash of lightning at ye wid only his nullah-nullah, ye'd begin to doubt if ye iver *wor* in a worse place.'

'There's something in this country that alters the heart of an Irishman,' said O'More, 'or I'd never hear one talk of a scrimmage with naked niggers as if it was a bayonet charge at a breach.'

'There's Irishmen that's rogues. I'm never the man to deny there's fools among them,' said the old man sardonically. 'Maybe we'll know who's right and who's wrong by this time to-morrow. My dogs has had their bristles up all day, and there's blacks within scent of us this blessed minit, if I know a musk-duck from a teal.'

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How fades the turmoil and distraction of daily thought beneath the cool, sweet, starry midnight! As each man paced between the watch-fires, gazing from time to time towards the recumbent drove, the silent, dark, mysterious forest, the blue space-eternities of the firmament, a feeling of calm, approaching to awe, fell on the party. High over the dark line of the illimitable forest rose towering snow-clad pinnacles, ghostly in their pallid grandeur. The rivulet murmured and rippled through the night-hush, plainly audible in the oppressive silence.

'One would think,' said Argyll to O'More, as they met on one of their rounds by a watch-fire, 'that this night would never come to an end. What possesses me I can't think, but I have an uncanny feeling, as Mrs. Teviot would say, that I cannot account for. If there was a ghost possible in a land without previous occupation, I should swear that one was near us this minute.'

'Do you believe in ghosts then?' asked O'More.

'Most certainly,' said Argyll, with cheerful affirmation; 'all Highlanders do. We have our family Appearance—a spectre I should recommend no man to laugh at. But that something is going to happen I will swear.'

'What on earth *can* happen?' said O'More. 'If it be only these skulking niggers, I wish to Heaven they would show out. It would be quite a relief after all this humbug of Warleigh's and that old fool of a stock-rider.'

'The old man's no fool,' said Argyll gravely; 'and though I felt annoyed with Warleigh to-day, I never have heard a word against his courage and bushmanship. Here he comes. By Jove! he treads as silently as the "Bodach Glas" himself. What cheer, General?'

Hubert held up a warning hand. 'Don't speak so loud,' he said; 'and will you mind my asking you to stand apart and to keep a bright look-out till daylight? Old Tom and I and the dogs are agreed that the blacks are not far off. I only hope the beggars will keep off till then. I intend to get out of this tribe's "tauri" to-morrow. In the meantime have your guns handy, for you never can tell when a black-fellow will make his dart.'

'I shouldn't mind going into half-a-dozen with a good blackthorn,' said O'More. 'It's almost cowardly to pull a trigger at naked men armed with sharp sticks.'

Hubert Warleigh looked straight at O'More's careless, wayward countenance for a few seconds before he answered; then he said, without sign of irritation:

'You will find them better at single-stick than you have any idea of. You are pretty good all round, but you can't allow for their wild-cat quickness. As for the sharpened sticks, as you call them, if you get one through you, you won't have the chance of saying where you would like another. Don't go too near the rocks; and if they make a rush, we must stand them off on that she-oak hill.'

'And what about the cattle?' asked Argyll.

'Let them rip. Blacks can't hurt them much. They may spear a few, but we can muster every hoof again inside of ten days. There are no other herds for them to mix with, and they won't leave the water far. I must move round now, and see that the men are ready.'

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLE OF ROCKY CREEK

'By Jove!' said Argyll, 'this looks serious. I must get away to my fire. We *must* stick to his directions. I'm in good rifle practice; they'll remember me in days to come!'

As O'More shrugged his shoulders and moved off, a shower of spears whistled through the air, while a chorus of cries and yells, as though from a liberated Inferno, rang through the woods along the line of the broken, stony country, though no human form could be seen.

The commotion created by this sudden onslaught, in spite of Hubert Warleigh's precautions, was terrific. The startled, frantic cattle dashed through the watch-fires, scattering the brands and almost trampling their guardians underfoot. Then the heavy-footed droves rolled away, madly crashing through the timber, until the echo of their hoofs died away in the distance. Several head, however, had been mortally wounded, well-nigh transfixed in some cases. They staggered and fell.

At the first surprise of the onset, guns were fired with an instinctive desire of reprisal, but no settled plan of defence seemed to be organised. Then amid the tumult was heard the trumpet-like voice of Hubert Warleigh.

'Every man to his tree; don't fire till you are sure; look out for the rocks! Keep cool. We have only to stand them off for an hour. It's near daylight.'

His words reassured all. And a shot which came from his double-barrelled rifle apparently told, as a smothered yell was heard from the cover.

'Take that, ye murdtherin' divils!' said old Tom, who

had crawled behind a fallen log, and now raising himself, poured three shots from a gun and a brace of horse-pistols into the enemy. 'I seen one of ye go down thin, and it's not the only one we'll have this blessed night.'

'There's number two,' said Gerald O'More, as he rolled over a tall man with stripes of white and red pigment, who had dashed out for an instant.

'Well done, O'More!' cried Hubert, with a cheery ring in his voice. 'Make as much noise as you like now, but don't give away a chance. Look out!'—as three spears hissed dangerously close—'you'll be hit if you don't mind, and——'

'Hang the brutes!' shouted O'More. 'We could charge if we could only see them. What do you think of it, Hamilton?'

'We shall come out straight,' said that gentleman, with his customary coolness, 'if we behave like disciplined troops and not like recruits. Pardon me, O'More, but this impetuosity is out of place. If one of us get hurt it may demoralise the men and give the blacks confidence.'

'Never fear,' said the excited young man. 'It's not the front rankers that drop the fastest. By George!' This half-ejaculation was elicited by a spear-point which, passing between the arm and body, grazed his side.

'I told you so,' said Hamilton. 'Why the deuce can't you behave reasonably! These imps of darkness can see us better than we see them. How they are yelling in the rear!'

'That's to draw us off,' said Gerald. 'I won't go behind a tree now, if I was to be here for seven years. But that spear didn't come far. It's one they throw with the hand—old Tom taught me that much; I'll have the scoundrel if I see the night out.'

A sustained volley along the line from the main body of stock-riders at the rear, headed by Ardmillan, Neil Barrington, and Argyll, appeared to have told upon the enemy. More than one dying yell was heard. The spears were less constant, and though several blows and bruises had been inflicted by thrown boomerangs and nullahs, no serious casualty had occurred among the white men.

On the right wing of the advanced guard old Tom had

ensconced himself behind a huge fallen tree, which hid both himself and his dogs. These last growled ominously, but took no further part, as yet, in the fray.

From behind his entrenchment the old man fired rapidly, from time to time loudly exulting, as a death-cry rang out on the night air or a spear buried itself in the fallen tree.

'Throw away, ye infernal black divils!' shouted the old man; and after the cautious stillness it was strange to hear the reckless tones echoing through the forest shades. 'I'll back the old single-barrel here against a scrubful of yees—always belavin' in a little cover.'

'Tek it cool, full-private Glendinning,' said Dick Evans, who had advanced in light-infantry skirmishing order from the rear. 'Not so much talking in the ranks, and mark time when ye're charging the inimy; it looks more detarmined and collected-like—as old Hughie Gough used to say. Please God, it'll soon be daylight; perhaps they'd gather thick enough then to let us go at 'em with the bayonet like.'

'Maybe ye won't be so full of yer pipeclay if ye gets one of thim reed spears into ye—my heavy curse on them! Mr. Hubert says he catched a sight of that divil's-joynt of a Donderah; the thribe says he was niver known to lave a fight without a dead man's hair.'

'He don't know white men yet,' said Dick, ''ceptin' he's sneaked on to a hut-keeper. He'll be taken down to-night if he don't look out! Well done, Master Guy!'

This exclamation was due to the result of a snapshot from Guy, who had drawn trigger upon a savage, who, bounding forward, had thrown two spears with wonderful rapidity, and bolted for his cover, his whole frame quivering with such intensity of muscular action, that the limbs were scarcely visible in the dim light. However, the keen eyes and ready aim of youth were upon him; he reached the scrub but to spring upward and fall heavily back, a dead man.

Although none of the whites had as yet been wounded, while several of their savage enemies had been disabled or killed outright, still the contest was unsatisfactory.

They were uncertain as to the number of their enemies, who, concealed in the scrub, sent forth volleys of spears. Occasionally an outburst of cries and yells arose, so fiendishly

replete with hatred, that the listeners in that sombre forest involuntarily felt their blood curdle. For aught they knew, the tribe might be gradually surrounding them. Indeed, an attempt of this kind was made. But it was frustrated by their watchful leader, who charged into the darkness with a few picked men, and drove the wily savages back to the main body.

On this occasion he had caught a glimpse of the giant Donderah, whose cruelty had been a chronicle of the tribe.

'I can't make out where the big brute got to,' he said to old Tom, 'or I should be easier in my mind. He's a crafty devil, though he's so big and strong, and he has some superstition, they told me, about never going out of a fight without a death to his credit. He knows about me, too, though we never met. It wasn't his fault that I got back alive. A black girl told me that. They named him after the mountain. There's not a blackfellow from here to the coast that can stand before him, they say. If O'More doesn't take care, he'll have him as sure as a gun. I have half a mind to see if he has dropped flat in that stone gunya.'

It happened just then that one of the lulls, common in savage warfare, took place. Hubert Warleigh flitted, noiseless and shadow-like, to another part of the camp, lest a diversion should be effected in a weaker spot.

Before changing position he gave instructions to old Tom, whose practised eye and ear could be depended upon, and whose distrust of the savage he knew to be proof against apparent security.

'I'll be back soon,' he said, 'for if Donderah did not fall back with the others, we are none of us too safe. I've known him drag a man out, with half a tribe close to his heels.'

Old Tom was much of the same opinion, for at the border stations tales of the Myall blacks were told by the aboriginals employed about the place. The exploits of the Titanic Donderah, 'cobaun big fellow and plenty boomalli white fellow,' had attained Homeric distinction.

The old man peered keenly through the dim glades, and listened as he bent forward, still sheltered by his tree, and resting one hand upon the neck of the dog Smoker, whose low growling he strove to repress.

'Bad scran to ye,' he said, 'do ye want every murdtherin'

thief of the tribe to know the tree I'm under? Maybe *he's* not far off, and ye're winding him. I never knew yer tongue to be false, or I'd dhrive in the ribs of ye. Ha, ye big divil!' he screamed, 'ye're there afther all; 'twas a bould trick of ye to hide in that stone gunya. Ye nearly skivered that gay boy from the ould country. Holy saints! sure he's a dead man now! Was there ever such a gommoch!'

This uncomplimentary exclamation was called forth by the apparition of a herculean savage, who leaped out of the lava blocks of the rude, circular miami—a long-abandoned dwelling-place, probably a century old, and but slightly raised above the basaltic rocks of the promontory. Starting up, as if out of the night, he flung two spears at the only white man unsheltered. Like a diving seal he cast himself downwards, and was again invisibly safe.

One of the javelins nearly made an end of Gerald O'More. It was from such weapons, hurled with a sinewy arm, that the half-dozen cattle in the camp had fallen. They found, next morning, that a spear, piercing the flank, had gone *clean through* an unlucky heifer, and passed out at the other side.

However that may have been, Gerald the Dauntless was not the man to remain to be made a target of. Rushing forward, with a shout that told of West of Ireland associations, he charged the miniature citadel, determined to kill or capture his enemy. Before he reached the apparently deserted gunya, a dark form might have been observed by eyes more keen for signs of woodcraft, to worm itself, serpent-like, along the path which O'More trod heedlessly.

As if raised by magic from the earth, suddenly the huge Donderah stood erect in his path, and with the bound of a famished tiger, sprang within Gerald's guard. The barrel of his fowling-piece was knocked up, and with one tremendous blow the Caucasian lay prone upon the earth. His foe commenced to drag him within the circle of the (possibly) sacrificial stones.

But before he could effect his purpose, a hoarse cry caused the savage to pause and falter. Hubert Warleigh, with his gun clubbed, was bounding frantically towards the triumphant champion.

But the distance was against the white man, though his panther-like bounds reduced the race to a question of seconds.

'Hould on, Mr. Hubert!' yelled old Tom, who had quitted his coign of vantage, followed by the excited dogs, no longer to be restrained. 'Sure, we'll have him, the murdtherin' thafe. The others is fell back, since thim two dropped to Mr. Hamilton's pay-rifle—more power to him. Here, boys! hould him! hould him! Smoker! Spanker! soole him!'

The old man yelled like a fiend; and as the startled savage saw the grim hounds stretching to the earth in full pursuit of him, he dropped his prey in terror of the unaccustomed foe.

'At him, Spanker! hould him, Smoker!' screamed the old man, 'tear the throat of him. Marciful Saver! did any one ever see the like of that! But I'll have the heart's blood of ye, if ye were the Diaoul out of h—l, this—night.'

This mixture of religious adjuration and profanity from the lips of the excited old stock-rider was elicited by another cast of the fatal dice.

As the brawny savage glanced at the dogs, which were rapidly nearing him, and upon the powerful form of Hubert Warleigh, who bade fair to challenge him before he could reach his covert, loaded as he was, he unwillingly relinquished his victim. With a couple of bounds he reached the gunya, where, crouching behind the largest boulder, he awaited the attack. But it was not like Hubert Warleigh to leave the wounded man. Stooping for a moment, he raised O'More in his arms, with a violent effort threw him across his shoulder, and marched towards the encampment.

As he half turned in the effort, the savage raised himself to his full height, and, poising a spear, stood for a moment as if uncertain whether he should expend its force upon the old stock-rider and his dogs or against his white antagonist.

At that moment a yell from the main body of blacks showed that they had been forced to retreat. He was therefore separated from his companions, towards whom the wary stock-rider was advancing with a view of cutting him off.

'Look out!' shouted the old man to Hubert, as he marked the savage take sudden aim. 'By ——! he'll nail you!'

At the warning cry Hubert swung half round, turning his broad breast to the foe and shielding his unconscious burden as best he might. The wild warrior drew himself back for

an instant, and then—like a cloth-yard shaft from a strong yew bow—the thin, dark, wavering missile sped only too truly. Deeply, venomously it pierced the mighty chest, beneath which throbbed the true and fearless heart of Hubert Warleigh. Freeing one hand, he broke the spear-shaft across like a reed-stalk, and without stay or stagger strode forward with his burden.

As the last battle scene was enacted, the dawn light struggled through a misty cloud-rack, and permitted clearer view of the tragedy to the rank and file of the expedition.

When the deadly missile struck their leader, a wild shout broke from the whites, and a charge in line was made towards the stone gunya, immediately in the rear of which the main body of the natives had collected for a desperate stand.

As if in answer, a strange, unnatural cry, half human only, burst upon their ears. They turned to behold a singular spectacle. Carried away by his exultation at the triumph of his aim and his revenge upon the foeman who had baulked him of his prey, the champion of a primeval race lingered ere he turned to flight in the direction of his companions.

He was too late. The bandogs of destiny were upon him, grim, merciless, with red glaring eyes and gleaming fangs. In his attention to his spear he had forgotten to pick up his nullah-nullah (or club), with which he would have been a match for any canine foe. A few frantic bounds were made by the doomed quarry as the eager dogs looked wolfishly up into his terror-stricken countenance. Another step, and the red dog, springing suddenly, seized his throat with unrelaxing grip, while Spanker's sharp tusks sank into his flank, tearing at the quivering flesh as he fell heavily upon the earth.

'Whoo-whoop, boys! Whoop!' screamed old Tom, breathless and excited to the blood-madness of the Berserker. 'That's the talk. Worry, worry, worry! good dogs, good dogs! At him Spanker, boy, ye're blood up to the eyes. Stick to him, Smoker, throttle him like a dingo. How the eyes of him rolls. Mercy be hanged!' he replied in answer to the protest of one of the men. 'What mercy did he show to Mr. Hubert, and him helpless, with that gossoon in his arms? Maybe ye didn't think of the harm ye were doing, ye black snake that ye are,' he continued, apostro-

phising the writhing form, which the ruthless hounds dragged to and fro with the ferocity of their kind; the brindle dog revelling in the dreadful banquet, wherein his head was ever and anon plunged to the glaring eyes, while the red hound held his fell grip upon the lacerated throat.

'Maybe it's kind father to ye to dhrive yer spear through any mortial craychur that belongs to a strange thribe, white or black. There's more like ye, that's had betther tachin', so I'll give ye a riddance out of yer misery. And it's more than ye'd do for me av ye had me lyin' there under the fut of ye.'

With this closing sentiment, nearer to recognition of a sable brother than he had ever been known to exhibit, the old stock-rider raised his gun. 'Come off, ye divils! d'ye hear me, now?' he said, striking the brindle dog heavily with his gun, who then only drew off, licking his gory lips and looking greedily at the bleeding form; while the red dog, more obedient or less fell of nature, relinquished his hold at the first summons.

'Ye've had yer punishment, I'll go bail, in this world, whatever happens in the next,' said the old man grimly, as he pulled the trigger of his piece in a matter-of-fact manner. The charge passed through the skull of the mangled wretch, who, leaping from the earth and throwing out his arms in the death agony, fell on his face with a crash.

'There's an ind of ye,' said the ruthless elder. 'The blood of a betther man will be cowld enough before the day's out. Come away, dogs, ye've had divarshion enough for one huntin'. Sure, they're far away—the black imps of Satan,' he said, as he listened intently to a distant chorus of wailing cries. 'It's time to get the camp in order. I wonder when we'll git thim bullocks agin?'

It was indeed time to comply with the old man's suggestion. Leaving the quivering corpse, the men turned away with a sense of relief, to commence their less tragic duties. At the camp much was to be arranged; all disorder was rife since the attack.

Huddled together were heaps of flour-bags, camp-kettles, and pannikins. The tents were overthrown, torn, and bedraggled. The frantic cattle had stampeded over the spot chosen with circumspection by the cook, as the strewn débris of beef and damper witnessed.

The horses were nearly all absent—some hobbled, some loose. Not a hoof of the horned herd was to be seen. Everything in the well-ordered camp, so lately presenting a disciplined appearance, seemed to have been the sport of evil genii.

Worse a hundredfold than all, beneath a hastily pitched tent, tended with anxious faces by his comrades, was stretched a wounded man, whose labouring breath came ever thickly and more blood-laden as the sun rose upon the battlefield, which secured for the white man one of the richest provinces of Australia. Yes! the stark limbs were feeble, the keen eye was dim, the stout heart was throbbing wildly, or feebly pulsating with life's waning flame. Hubert Warleigh lay a-dying! His hour was come. The hunter of the hills, the fearless wood-ranger, was helpless as a sick child. The weapon of his heathen foe had sped home.

Argyll, Hamilton, Ardmillan, and the others stood around his rude pallet with saddened hearts. Each voice was hushed as they watched the spirit painfully quitting the stalwart form of him whom they had all learned to know and to trust.

'We have bought our country dearly,' said Wilfred, as a spasm distorted the features of the dying man and caused his strong limbs to quiver and writhe. Over his chest was thrown a rug, redly splashed, which told of the death-wound, from which the life-blood welled in spite of every attempt to staunch it. Beside him sat Gerald O'More, buried in deepest grief.

'Better take the lie of the country from me,' said the wounded man feebly. 'One of you might write it down, with the bearings of the rivers, while my head keeps right. How hard it seems! Just made a start for a new country and a new life. And now to be finished off like this! The Warleigh luck all over. I might have known nothing could come of it, but——' Here his voice grew choked and indistinct, while from the saturated wrappings the blood dripped slowly and with a dreadful distinctness upon the earthen floor. A long pause. Again he held up his hand. 'It will take every man that can be spared to get the cattle and horses together again. A week ought to do it; it's easy tracking with no others about. You can knock up a "break" to count through. Make sure you've got the lot

before you start away. Leave Effingham and Argyll with me. I'll tell them about the course; you're near the open country. I little thought when I saw it next I should be —should be—like this.'

They obeyed the dying leader to the last. All left the tent except Wilfred and Argyll. The success of the expedition depended on the cattle being recovered without loss of time. Though a monarch dies, the work of this world must go on. Few indeed are they for whom the wheels of the mighty machine can be stopped. Hubert Warleigh was the last man to desire it.

'It's no good stopping to "corroboree" over me,' he said, with a touch of humour lighting up the glazing eye. 'It's lucky you haven't O'More to wake as well as me. You won't laugh at blacks' weapons any more, eh, Gerald?'

'Small laughing will do me for many a day, my dear boy. You have forgiven the rash fool that nearly lost his own life and wasted that of a better man? I deserve all I've got. But for you—cut off in the prime of your days, how shall I ever forget it? Forgive me, Hubert Warleigh, as you hope to be forgiven.'

Here the warm-hearted passionate Milesian cast himself on his knees beside the dying man, and burying his face in his hands, sobbed aloud in an agony of grief and humiliation. 'Don't fret over it, O'More,' said the measured tones of the dying man. 'It's all in the day's work. People always said I'd be hanged, you know; but I'm going off the hooks honourably, anyhow. *You* couldn't help it; and, indeed, I was away when you charged that poor devil Donderah. I'm afraid old Tom's dogs mauled him badly. But look here,' —turning to Wilfred,—'you get a pencil and I'll show you how the rivers run. There's the Bogong Range — and the three rivers with the best country in Australia between them. When you come to the lower lakes, you can follow them to the sea. There's an outlet, but it's choked up with sand-bars. Somewhere near the mouth there's a decent harbour and a good spot for a township. It will be a big one some day. Now you're all right and can shift for yourselves. Effingham, I want to say a word to you before I go.'

Wilfred bent over him and O'More and Argyll left the tent. 'Come near me,' he whispered, in tones which,

losing strength with the decay of life's force, sounded hollow and dull. 'I feel it so hard and bitter to die. I should have had a chance—my only chance—here, and as head explorer I might have risen to a decent position. Such a simple way to go under too. If that rash beggar hadn't mulled it with Donderah I should have been right. Some men would have left him there. But I couldn't do it—I *couldn't* do it.'

'Old Tom and his dogs avenged you,' said Wilfred. 'They ate Donderah alive almost, before the old man shot him.'

'Poor devil!' said the dying man; 'so he came off worse than I did. Old Tom wouldn't show him much mercy. I shan't be long after him. Hang it! what a puff of smoke a fellow's life is when he dies young. It seems the other day I was learning to ride at Warbrok, and Clem and Randal coming home from the King's School for the holidays. Well, the three Warleighs are done for now. The wild Warleighs! wild enough, and not a paying game either. But I'm running on too fast about all these things, and my heart's going, I feel. Are you sure you've got the chart all right, with the rivers and the lakes all correct—and the harbour——'

'I think so. We can make our way to the coast now. But why trouble yourself about such matters? Surely they are trifles compared with the thoughts which should occupy your last moments?'

'I don't know much about that,' said the stricken bushman, raising himself for an instant and looking wistfully in his companion's face. 'If a man dies doing his duty he may as well back it right out. What gave me the only real help I ever had? Your father's kind words and your family's kind acts. They made a man of me. It's on that road that I'm dying now, respected as a friend by all of you, instead of like a dog in a ditch or a "dead-house." Now I have two things to say before I go. I want you to have the best run. It's all good, but the best's the best, and you may as well have it. I was to have my pick.'

Wilfred made a gesture of deprecation, but the other continued, with slow persistence:

'You see where the second river runs into the third one? The lake's marked near it on the south. There's an angle of

flat country there, the grandest cattle-run you ever set eyes on. Dry, sheltered rises for winter; rich flats and marshes for summer. Naturally fenced too. I christened it "The Heart" in my own mind. It's that shape. So you sit down there, and leave Guy on it when you go home. He'll do something yet, that boy. He's a youngster after my own heart. And there's one more thing—the last—the very last.'

'Rest yourself, my dear fellow,' said Wilfred, raising his head and wiping the death-damp from his forehead, as his eyes closed in a death-like faint. But the dying man raised himself unsteadily to a sitting position. An unearthly lustre gleamed in the dim eyes, the white lips moved mechanically, as the words, like the murmur of the breeze-touched shell, issued from them.

'I told you I loved your sister Annabel. When I looked at her I thought I had never seen a woman before. Tell her she was never out of my head for one moment since the day I first saw her. Every step I made since was towards a life that should have been worthy of her. I would have been rich for her, proud for her, even book-taught for her sake. I was learning in spare moments what I should have known as a boy. She might never have taken to me—most likely not; but she would have known that she had helped to save a man's life—a man's soul. Tell her that this man went to his death, grieving most for one thing, that he should see her face no more. And now, give me your hand, Wilfred, for Gyp Warleigh's time is up.'

He grasped the hand held out to him with a firm and nervous clasp; then relinquishing it gradually, an expression of peace and repose overspread his face, the laboured breathing ceased. His respiration became more natural and easy, but the ashen hue of his face showed yet more colourless and grey. The tired eyes closed; the massive head fell back on the pillow of rugs; the lower portion of the features relaxed; a slight shiver passed over the frame. Wilfred bent closely, tenderly, over the still face. The faithful spirit of the last male heir of the house of Warleigh had passed away.

When the stock-riders returned that evening after the long day's tracking and heard of their leader's death, many a wild heart was deeply stirred. At day-dawn they dug him a deep

grave beneath a mighty spreading mountain ash, and piled such a cairn above him that no careless hand could disturb the dead. As they removed his clothes for the last sad robing process, two small volumes fell from an inner pocket.

'Ha!' said Neil Barrington, 'one of them is the book I saw him poring over that day. I wonder whether it's a novel? By Jove, though, who'd have thought that? Why, it's an old History of England. The poor old chap was getting up his education by degrees. It makes the tears come into one's eyes.'

Here the good-hearted fellow drew his handkerchief across his face.

CHAPTER XXIV

GYP'S LAND

THE cattle were tracked down and regathered without difficulty. In the virgin forest no slot but their own could possibly exist. When they quitted the scene of their encounter, the explorers passed into a region of grand savannahs and endless forest parks, waving with luxuriant grasses. Each day awakened fresh raptures of admiration. But the rudest stock-rider never alluded to the ease with which they now followed the well-fed herd, without a curse (in the nature of an epitaph) upon those who had robbed them of a comrade and a commander.

'A magnificent country,' said Argyll, as on the third day they camped the foremost drove on the bank of a broad river in the marshy meadows, on which the cattle spread out, luxuriating in the wild abundance of pasture; 'and how picturesque those snow-peaks; the groves of timber, sending their promontories into the plains; the fantastic rocks! It is a pastoral paradise. And to think that the only man of our party who fell a victim should be poor Warleigh, the discoverer of this land of promise!'

'The way of the world, my dear fellow,' said Ardmillan. 'The moment a man gets his foot on the threshold of success, Nemesis is aroused. Poor Gyp had been fighting against his demon for years, and had reached the region of respectability. He would soon have been rich enough to conciliate Mrs. Grundy. She would have enlarged upon his ancient birth, his handsome face and figure, with the mildest admission that he had been, years ago, a little wild. Of course he is slain within sight of his promised land.'

'We had all got very fond of him, and that's the truth,' said Hamilton. 'He was the gentlest creature, considering his tremendous strength—self-denying in every way, and so modest about his own endowments. It was very touching to listen to his regrets for the ignorance in which he had been suffered to grow up. I had planned, indeed, to supply some of his deficiencies after we were settled.'

'I should think so,' said Fred Churbett. 'I wouldn't have minded doing a little myself. I don't go in for "moral pocket-ankercher" business, but a man of his calibre was better worth saving than a province of savages. Amongst us we should have coached him up, in a year or so, fit to run for the society little-go; and now to think that one of these wretched anthropoids should have slain our Bayard!'

'What made it such a beastly shame,' said Neil Barrington, 'is that we shall all get "disgustingly rich," as Hotson said, and be known as the pioneers of Gyp's Land (as the men have christened the district), while the real hero lies in a half-forgotten grave.'

'Time may make us as unthankful as the rest of the world,' said Wilfred. 'We can only console ourselves with the thought that we sincerely mourned our poor friend, and that Hubert Warleigh's memory will remain green, long after recognition of his services has faded away. It has had a lasting effect upon O'More. The poor fellow believes himself to blame for the disaster. I have scarcely seen him smile since.'

'He's a good, kind-hearted fellow,' said Fred Churbett, 'and I honour him for it. He told me that he never regretted anything so much in his life as disregarding Warleigh's advice about the blacks. He said the poor chap made no answer to some stupid remarks about being afraid of naked savages, but smiled gravely, and walked away without another word. Yet, to save O'More's life, he gave his own!'

'Whom the gods love die young,' said Hamilton. 'Some of us may yet have cause to envy him. And now, about the choice of runs. How are we to arrange that?'

'We are now in the good country,' said Argyll. 'Towards the coast, we shall all meet with more first-class grazing land than we know what to do with. I think no one should be nearer than seven miles or more than ten miles from any

other member of the Association. I for one will go nearer to the coast.'

'And I,' said Fred Churbett, 'will stay just where I am. This is good enough for me, as long as I can defend myself against the lords of the soil.'

There was no difficulty in locating the herds of the association upon their 'pastures new.' In every direction waved the giant herbage of a virgin wilderness. There were full-fed, eager-running rivers, for which the melting snow at their sources furnished abundant supplies. There were deep fresh-water lakes, on the shores of which were meadows and headlands rich with matted herbage.

Wild-fowl swarmed in the pools and shallows. Kangaroos were so plentiful that old Tom's dogs 'were weary at eve when they ceased to slay,' and commenced to look with indifference upon the scarcely-thinned droves. Timber for huts and stock-yards was plentiful; so that axes, mauls, and wedges were soon in full and cheerful employment. Each squatter selected an area large enough for his stock for the next dozen years, keeping sufficiently close to his friends for visiting, but not near enough for complications. In truth, the rivers and creeks were of such volume that they easily supplied natural boundaries.

As for Wilfred and Guy, they carefully followed out the instructions of their lost friend, until they verified the exact site of the 'run' he had recommended to them. This they discovered to be a peninsula. On one side stretched the shore of a lake, and on the other a deep and rapid river flowed, forming a natural enclosure many miles in extent, into which, when they had turned their herd, they had little trouble in keeping them safely.

'My word!' said Guy, 'this is something like a country. Why, we have run for five or six thousand head, and not a patch of scrub or a range on the whole lot of it. Splendid open forest, just enough for shelter; great marshes and flats, where the stock are up to their eyes in grass and reeds. When the summer comes, it will be like a garden. It rains here *every year* and no mistake.'

'We are pretty far south,' said Wilfred; 'in somewhere about latitude 37—no great distance from the sea. That accounts for the climate. You can see by the blacks' miamis,

which are substantial and covered with thatch, that a different kind of dwelling-place is necessary, even for the aboriginals. You will have to build good warm huts, I fancy, or the winter gales and sleet-storms will perish you.'

'You let me alone for that!' said the ardent youngster. 'We shall have lots of time to work, as soon as the cattle are broken in and the working bullocks get strong. Our drays must come by sea; but sledges are all right for drawing split stuff. I shall build on that bluff above the lake. We can keep a good look-out there for the blacks, that they don't come sneaking up by day or night. Oh, how jolly it all is! If I could forget about dear old Hubert, I should be perfectly happy.'

'I suppose we shall have to choose a site for the township.'

'Township!' said Guy. 'What do we want with a beastly township? Two public-houses and a blacksmith's shop to begin with! The next thing will be that they will petition the Government to survey some land and cut it up in farms.'

'Well, that's true,' assented Wilfred, smiling at his impetuosity; 'but we must not be altogether selfish. Remember, there is a good landlocked harbour and a deep anchorage. A township is morally certain to be formed, and we may as well take the initiative. Besides, we promised Rockley to let him know if there was any opening for a mercantile speculation.'

'That alters the matter,' said Guy. 'I would black old Billy's boots if he was short of a valet—not to mention kind Mrs. Rockley, whom all the fellows would walk barefoot to serve. I may be mistaken, but you're rather sweet upon Christabel, ain't you? I'm not in the marrying line myself, but I don't know a prettier girl anywhere.'

'Pooh! don't talk nonsense, there's a good fellow,' said Wilfred with a dignified air. 'There are miles of matters to be thought about before anybody—dark or fair. But you are right in your feelings about Rockley and his dear, kind wife, which makes me proud of my junior partner. We shall want somebody to buy and sell for us, to order our stores, etc.; and as nothing can come from Sydney on wheels, we shall have to get them from that new settlement they call Port Phillip, that we heard at the "Snowy" they were making such a talk about. We can't escape a town; and as there is bound

to be a chief merchant, we had better elect our own King William to that high office and dignity.'

'With all my heart,' said Guy; 'only you frightened me at first, talking about a town. We haven't come all this way—through those hungry forests and terrible cold rivers, not to mention the blacks—to be crowded out of our runs, for farmers.'

'You needn't be alarmed, Guy. Remember, this district is a very large one. You will have twenty years' squatting tenure, you may be sure, before an acre of your land is sold.'

Guy was correct in his anticipations of the probability of there being water-carriage before long. The surplus hands, who were paid off and sent back to New South Wales, talked largely, as is their wont, about the wonderful new district. Port Phillip, just settled, had a staff of adventurers on hand, ready for any kind of enterprise. Within a few weeks a brig, with a reasonable supply of passengers, did actually arrive at the little roadstead, which had already been dignified with the title of The Port. There was the usual assortment of alert individuals that invariably turn up at the last new and promising settlement in Australia,—land speculators, store-keepers, gentlemen of no particular calling, waifs and strays, artisans and contractors. But among the babel of strange tongues resounded one familiar voice, the resonant cheery tones of which soon made themselves heard, to the great astonishment and equal joy of such of the wayfarers as had assembled at the disembarkation. Their old and tried friend, Mr. William Rockley, once more greeted them in the flesh.

'Well, here you all are, safe and sound, except poor Gyp Warleigh!' said that gentleman, after the ceremony of greeting and hand-shaking had been most cordially performed. 'Most melancholy occurrence—terrible, in fact—heard of it at Port Phillip—all the news there, of course—very rising place. Ran down in the *Rebecca*, brig—nearly ran on shore too. Thought I'd come on and see you all; find out if anything was to be done. Nothing like first chance, at a new settlement, eh? Queer fellow, our captain; too much brandy and water. Catch me sailing with him after we get back.'

Mr. Rockley added new life and vigour to the infant settlement. His practical eye fixed upon a spot more suitable for a township than The Port, which he disparaged as a

'one-horse' place, which would never come to much. Indifferent anchorage, with no protection against south-east gales. Might be made decent with a breakwater; but take time—time. A few miles up the river—fine stream, deep water, and good wharfage. He should run up a store, and send down a cargo of odds and ends at once. Fine district—good soil, splendid climate, and so on. Must progress—*must* progress. Never seen finer grass, splendidly watered too. You've fallen on your feet, I can tell you. All through Gyp Warleigh too. Poor fellow!—awful pity!

Mr. Rockley borrowed a horse, rode inland and visited the stations, being equally encouraging and sanguine about their prospects. '*Can't* go wrong; lots of fat cattle in a year or two; make all your fortunes; can't help it; only look out for the rascally blacks; don't allow yourselves to be lulled into security; have a slap at you again some day, take my word for it. Know them well; never trust a blackfellow; always make him walk in front of you—can't help using a tomahawk if he sees a chance; keep 'em at arm's length—no cruelty—but make 'em keep their distance. Glorious rains at Yass and all over New South Wales. Season changed with a vengeance! Stock rising like mad; ewes two guineas a head and not to be got. Cattle, horses, snapped up the moment they're offered. Everybody wild to bring stock overland to Port Phillip. By Jove! that *is* a wonderful place if you like; fine harbour—make half-a-dozen of Sydney—thirty miles from the Heads to the town. Not so picturesque of course; but splendid open country, plains, forests, and fertile land right up to the town. Great place by and by. Nothing but speculation, champagne, and kite-flying at present. Bought town allotments; buy some more as we go back. You'd better pick up two or three corner lots, Wilfred, my boy. Money? Never mind *that!* I'll find the cash. Your security's first-rate now, I can tell you.'

And so their guest rattled on, brimful of great ideas, large investments, and goodwill to all men, as of yore.

Wilfred, who had indeed now no particular reason for remaining, but on the contrary many motives to draw him towards The Chase, was only too glad to avail himself of a passage in the *Rebecca*, the truculent captain notwithstanding. That worthy, who appeared to be a compound of sailor and

smuggler, with a dash of pirate, swaggered about the beach for a few days, and after a comprehensive carouse with such of his late passengers as he could induce to join him, announced his intention of sailing next day—and did so.

Arrived at Melbourne, as the infant city had just been christened, Wilfred was astonished at the life and excitement everywhere discernible. On the flats bordering the river Yarra Yarra had been hastily erected a medley of huts, cottages, and tents, in which resided a miscellaneous rout of settlers, storekeepers, speculators, auctioneers, publicans, Government officials, artisans, and labourers.

He witnessed for the first time the initial stage of urban colonisation. What he chiefly wondered at was the restless energy, the sanguine spirits, the dauntless courage of the miscellaneous host employed in founding the southern metropolis.

The situation had been well chosen. The river which bisected the baby city, though not broad, was yet clear, deep, and, as its aboriginal name implied, 'ever flowing.' Large vessels were compelled to remain in the bay, but coasters came up the river and discharged on the banks of the natural basin, which had decided the site of the town.

Around—afar—stretching even to the distant horizon, were broad plains, park-like forests, hill and dale. The soil was rich for the most part; while a far blue range to the north-east pointed to an untried region, beyond which might lie (ay, and *did* lie) treasures yet undreamed of.

'All truly wonderful,' said Wilfred. 'The world is a large place, as the little bird said. We have got outside of our garden wall with a vengeance. How slow it seems of us to have been sitting still at Lake William, ignorant of this grand country, only five hundred miles off—not to mention "Gyp's Land." I wonder if this will ever be much of a town. It is a long way from Sydney, which must always be the seat of Government.'

'Will it be much of a place?' echoed Rockley in a half-amused, meditative way. 'I am inclined to think it will. Let us ask this gentleman. How do you do, Mr. Fawkner?' he said, shaking hands with a brisk, energetic personage, who came bustling along the river-bank. 'Fine weather. Thriving settlement this of yours. My friend is doubting

whether it will ever come to much. Thinks it too far from Sydney.'

'What!' said the little man, who, dressed in corduroy trousers, with a buff waistcoat and long-skirted coat, looked like an Australian edition of Cobbett. 'Will it prosper? Why, sir, it will be the metropolis of the South—the London of this New Britain, sir! Nothing can stay its progress. Tasmania, where I came from, possesses a glorious climate and fine soil, but no extent, sir, no scope. New South Wales has fine soil, boundless territory, but eccentric climate. In Port Phillip, sir, below 35 south latitude, you have climate, soil, and extent of territory combined.'

Here the little man struck his stick into the damp, black soil with such energy that he could hardly pull it out again.

'I agree with you,' said Rockley good-humouredly, smiling at Fawkner's vehemence as if he, personally, were the most imperturbable of men. 'But you won't get the Sydney officials to do much for you for years to come. Five hundred miles is a long way from the seat of Government.'

'Cut the painter, sir, if they neglect us,' said the pioneer democrat. 'We shall soon be big enough to govern ourselves. Seen the first number of the *Port Phillip Patriot*? Here it is—printed with my own hands yesterday.'

Mr. Fawkner put his hand into a pocket of the long-skirted coat, and produced a very small, neatly printed broad-sheet, in which the editorials and local news struggled amid a crowd of advertisements of auctions, notices of land sales, and other financial assignations.

'And now, gentlemen, I must bid you good-bye,' said the little man. 'Canvassing for subscriptions to build a wooden bridge across the Yarra. Cost a lot of money, but must be done—must be done. Large trade with South Yarra—lime, timber, firewood—shortest way to the bay too.'

'Put us down for five pounds,' said Rockley. 'It will improve the value of the corner allotments we intend to buy—won't it, Wilfred? Good-bye.'

'Wonderful man that,' said Rockley; 'shrewd, energetic, rather too fond of politics. Came over in the first vessel from Van Diemen's Land. He and Batman thought they were going to divide all this country between them. You see that clear hill over there? They say that's where Batman

stood when he said, "All that I see is mine, and all that I don't see."'

'Very good,' said Wilfred. 'Grand conception of the true adventurer. And were his aspirations fulfilled?'

'Well, he bought all the land hereabouts—a few millions of acres—from blackfellows who called themselves chiefs. The other colonists disputed his royalty. The Government backed them up, and sent a superintendent to reign over them. However, he will do very well. Who's this tall man coming along? St. Maur, as I'm a living sinner!'

And that gentleman it turned out to be, extremely well-dressed, and sauntering about as if in Bond Street. His greeting, however, was most cordial, and smacked more of the wilderness than of the *pavé*.

'By Jove!' he said, 'you here, Rockley? I was just thinking of you and Effingham. Can't say how glad I am. Come into my miami. What a pity you couldn't have a throw in! Lots of money to be made. Made some myself already.'

'Daresay,' said Rockley. 'You're pretty quick when there's a spec. on hand. What have you been about?'

'Mixed herd of cattle. Turned overlander, as they call it here; brought over one on my own account, and another that I picked up on the road. Just going over to see Howie's horses sold. I want a hack. You come and lunch with me and Dutton and Tom Carne. We're over at "The Lamb"—some fellows from Adelaide there.'

'Certainly,' said Rockley, always ready for anything in the way of speculation or enterprise. 'Nothing better to do; and, by the way, Effingham, *we* shall want horses for riding home; for, as for going back with that atrocious, reckless, buccaneering ruffian, I'll see him d—d first!'

Here the sentence, ending with more force than elegance, merged in the loud ringing of an auctioneer's bell in close proximity to a large stock-yard at the corner of Bourke and Swanston Streets, near where a seductive soft-goods establishment now stands.

The yard contained over a hundred head of horses, which were permitted to run out one at a time, when, being completely encircled by the crowd, they remained confused, if not quieted, until their fate was decided.

An upstanding, unbroken grey filly happened to be separated just as they arrived—

> And struggling fiercely, but in vain,
> And snorting with erected mane.

The desert-born was on the point of being knocked down for fifty pounds, when Wilfred, infected by the extravagance of the day, bid another pound. She finally became his at the low price of sixty guineas.

'She's very green,' said St. Maur; 'just haltered, I should say. However, she has plenty of condition, and if you are going a journey, will be quiet enough in a week.'

'I like her looks,' said Wilfred. 'It's an awful price; but stock have risen so, that we shall reap the advantage in another shape. But for Rockley I should have gone back by sea.'

'I never consider a few pounds,' said that gentleman, 'where my life's concerned. I can just tell you, sir, that, in my opinion, the *Rebecca* is more than likely never to see Sydney at all if bad weather comes on. I shall buy that brown cob.'

After the cob had been bought, and a handsome chestnut by St. Maur, the friends strolled up to the famous Lamb Inn, long disestablished, like the cafés of the Quartier Latin, and there met with certain choice spirits, also rejoicing in the designation of 'overlanders.' They seemed on terms of intimacy with St. Maur, and cordially greeted his two friends. One and all had been lately concerned in large stock transactions—had been equally fortunate in their sales. Apparently they were minded to indemnify themselves for the perils of the waste by a full measure of such luxuries as the infant city afforded.

'Great place this Melbourne, St. Maur,' said a tall man with bushy whiskers. 'Decomposed basaltic formation, with an outcrop of empty champagne bottles. I saw a heap opposite Northcott's office yesterday like a glass-blower's débris. As fast as they emptied them they threw them out of the window. Accumulation in time—you know.'

'Northcott does a great business in allotments and house property,' said St. Maur; 'but it can't last for ever. Too much of that champagne element. But what's become of Warden—he was to have been here?'

'Forgot about the hour, I daresay,' said the man with the whiskers. 'Most absent fellow I know. Remember what he said to the Governor's wife at Adelaide? She asked him at dinner what he would take. Joe looked up from a dream (not of fair women, but of drovers and dealers), and thinking of the cattle he had just brought over, replied, "Six pounds a head all round, and the calves given in!"'

Mr. Joe Warden, blue-eyed and fair-haired as Cedric the Saxon, long afterwards famed as the most daring and successful of the explorers of that historic period, shortly joined them, apologising for his unpunctuality by declaring that he had bought two corner allotments and a flock of ewes within the last ten minutes.

'This is the kingdom of unlimited loo as applied to real estate—the region of golden opportunity, you see, Rockley,' said St. Maur. 'We are all hard at it buying and selling from morning to night. Must go the pace or be left behind. Half-acre allotments in Collins Street have brought as much as seventy pounds this very morning. Try that claret.'

'Quite right too. A very fair wine,' quoth Mr. Rockley, slowly savouring the ruby fluid. 'My dear St. Maur, you are right to buy everything that you can, as long as your credit lasts. I can see—and I stake my business reputation on the fact—a tremendous future in store for this town. It is not much in itself. The river's a mere ditch; the harbour a great ugly bay; the site of the town too flat; but the country!—the country around is grand and extensive. Nothing can take that away. It is not so rich as the spot my friend and I have just left; but it's fine—very fine. I'm not so young as I was, but I shall pitch my tent here and never go back to Sydney.'

'I hope to see Sydney again,' said St. Maur; 'but in the meantime I shall stay and watch the markets. I quite agree with you that there is money to be made.'

'Of course there is,' said Rockley; 'but how long will it last? People can't live upon buying and selling to each other for ever. Some fine day there will be an awful smash, in which some of you brisk young people will be caught. But the settlement is so first-class in soil and situation that it *must* pull through. I shall buy a few allotments, just to give me an interest, as the racing men say.'

'We can accommodate you,' said Mr. Raymond. 'But why don't you stay and set up in business here? You'd make a fortune a month, with your name and connections. Never mind Mrs. R. for the present; we're all bachelors here.'

'I see that—and a very jolly set you are. I wouldn't mind a month or two here at all. But my friend Effingham and I are tied to time to get home, and as we're going overland we haven't much time to spare.'

'Well, look us up whenever you come back. The door of the Lamb Inn is always open—night or day, for that matter. St. Maur and I are thinking of buying it, aren't we, Bertram, and turning it into a Club? We offered Jones a thousand for it, but he wouldn't take less than twelve hundred.'

'That would have been only a hundred apiece for a dozen of us,' said the man with the large whiskers, whose name was Macleod. 'Almost concluded it, but Morton died of D.T., Southey got married, and Ingoldsby went home. Nice idea, you know, being our own landlords.'

'Not bad at all,' said Rockley, who approved of everything when he was in a good-humour. 'A *very* original, business-like idea. Well, I must say good-bye to you all, gentlemen. I really wish I could stay longer.'

'Stay till next week,' pleaded Raymond. 'We are going to give a ball. No end of an entertainment. Two real carriages just landed, and the families pledged to bring them.'

'I notice a good many stumps in Collins Street,' said Wilfred. 'Won't that be a little dangerous for returning?'

'Not with decent horses,' said a young fellow with a dark moustache and one arm. 'I drove tandem through it about two o'clock this morning.'

'But you do everything so well, Blakesley,' said St. Maur. 'Speaking as an ordinary person, I must say I should funk the "Rue Bourke" or Collins after dark. But that is not our affair. Providence *couldn't* injure a lady when there are only ten in the community.'

'What about that brig, the *Rebecca*, that's sailing to-morrow for Sydney?' said a fresh-coloured, middle-aged personage who had spoken little, and, indeed, seemed oppressed with thought. 'You came down in her, Rockley, didn't you?'

'Like nothing about her,' said that gentleman with

decision. 'Badly found, badly manned, and the worst thing about her is the skipper. You don't catch me in her again, I can tell you. Effingham and I are going overland.'

'Indeed!' said the speaker, much surprised. 'I thought we should have been fellow-passengers. I never dreamed of any one riding all the way to Sydney, five or six hundred miles, when they could go by sea! If I'd known, I'd have changed my mind and started with you. It's too late now; I've paid my passage.'

'Look here, Bowerdale,' said Mr. Rockley with earnestness, 'I've paid my passage, and I forfeit it cheerfully rather than run the risk. If you knew Captain Jackson, you'd do it too. He'll lose the ship and all hands some day, as sure as my name's Rockley.'

'There's a good deal of luck in these things, I believe,' said the other. 'I must risk it anyhow. I can't afford to lose the money, and I want to get back to my wife and chicks as soon as I can. We officials haven't unlimited leave either, you know.'

'D—n the leave!' said Mr. Rockley volcanically, 'and the money too. I'll settle the last for you, and you can pay when you sell that suburban land you bought in Collingwood. There's a fortune in *that*. Your chief's a good fellow; he'll arrange the leave. Half the Civil Servants in Sydney have had a shot at Melbourne land, you know. Say the word, and come with us. There's a spare horse, isn't there, Effingham?'

'Lots of horse-flesh,' said Wilfred, following his friend's cue. 'Mr. Bowerdale will just complete our party—make it pleasanter for all.'

'You *are* a good fellow, Rockley,' said Mr. Bowerdale, smiling; 'and I thank you, Mr. Effingham; but I can't alter my arrangements, though I feel strangely tempted to do so. I have had a fit of the blues all the morning. Liver, I suppose—too much excitement. But I make a point of always carrying a thing through.'

'Take your own way,' grumbled Rockley. 'Well, I must be off, St. Maur. Effingham, did you forget about the pack-saddle? It's a strange thing nobody can remember anything but myself. St. Maur, I beg to thank you and these gentlemen for their most pleasant entertainment. Come

and see me at Yass, all of you, when you stop land-buying, or it stops you. Good-bye, Bowerdale; I can't help thinking you're a d—d fool.'

So the worthy and choleric gentleman departed, with his surplus steam not wholly blown off. All the way back he kept exploding at intervals, with remarks uncomplimentary to his unconvinced friend, who left by the *Rebecca*, which, with crew, captain, and passengers, was *never more heard of*.

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On the following morning Mr. Rockley and Wilfred rode forth along the Sydney road, then far from macadamised, and chiefly marked out by dray-ruts and a mile-wide trail made by the overlanders. Mr. Rockley rode one stout cob and led another. Wilfred bestrode an ambling black horse of uncertain pedigree, and led the grey filly, upon whose reluctant back he had managed to place a pack-saddle with their joint necessaries.

CHAPTER XXV

BOB CLARKE ONCE MORE WINS ON THE POST

THE homeward-bound horsemen had no difficulty about the road, well marked as it was by the travelling stock. There was also, as now, a mail service from Sydney. They met the mailman about half-way. He was riding one horse and leading another; he had often to camp out without fire, for fear of blacks. In due time they reached the site of the border town of Albury, on the broad waters of the Murray, all unknowing of the great wine-cellars its grapes were yet to fill, with reisling, muscat, and hermitage in mammoth butts, rivalling that of Heidelberg. Much less did they forecast the iron horse one day to rush forward, breathing woe and disquiet to the shy dryad of the river oaks, by the gleaming stream and the still depths of the reed-fringed lagoons.

Rude were the ways by which they travelled from the Murray to the Murrumbidgee River, by way of Gundagai, the great meadows of which were then undevastated by flood. Thence to Bowning, and so on to Yass, in which city the travellers were greeted with enthusiasm. The next morning saw the younger far on his way to The Chase.

What a change had taken place since the exodus—that memorable departure! But one little year had passed away, and what a transformation!

With the season everything had changed; all Australia was altered. Life itself was so different from that day when, half-despairingly, they rode behind their famished cattle, and turned their faces to the wilderness.

Now it had been crossed; the promised land won—a

land of milk and honey as far as they were concerned—of olives and vineyards—all the biblical treasures—no doubt looming in the future.

For this prosperity the discovery of Port Phillip was accountable, conjointly with the lavish, exuberant season. The glorious land of mountain and stream, valley and meadow, laden with pastoral wealth and bursting with vegetation, had been in a manner gifted to them by the gallant, ill-fated Hubert Warleigh. They were all revelling in the intensity of life, forming stations, buying and selling, speculating and calculating, and where was he? Lying at rest beneath the sombre shade of the forest giant, far from even the tread of the men of his race. Left to moulder away, with the fallen denizens of the primeval forest; to fade from men's minds even as the echo of the surges, as the spring songs of the joyous birds!

It seemed increasingly hard to realise. As he approached the well-known track that led from the main road to Warbrok he could see the very tree near which he had waved a farewell at their first meeting. There was the gate through which they had ridden on the occasion of his second visit, when he had been received on terms of equality by the whole family.

'How glad I am now that we did that!' Wilfred told himself. 'We tried our best to raise him from the slough into which he had fallen, and from no selfish motive; how little we thought to be so richly repaid! One often intends a kindness to some one who dies before it is fulfilled. Then there is unavailing, perhaps lifelong regret. Here it was not so, thank God! And now, home at last—— "

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Of that happy first evening what description can be given that faintly shall suggest the atmosphere of love and gratitude that enveloped the family, as once more Wilfred sat among them in the well-remembered room? Speech even died away, in that all might revel in an uninterrupted view of the returned wanderer. How improved, though bronzed and weather-beaten, he was after his wayfaring!

'And to think that Wilfred has returned safe from those dreadful blacks! And oh, poor dear Hurbert Warleigh! That fine young man, so lately in this room with us, full of

health and strength, and now to know that he is dead—killed by savages—it is too dreadful!'

'Mamma! mamma!' said Annabel, sobbing aloud, 'don't speak of it. I can't bear it.'

Here she arose and left the room.

'She is very sensitive, dear child,' said Mrs. Effingham. 'I do not wonder at her feeling the poor fellow's death. I can't help thinking about him, as if he were in some way more than an acquaintance.'

'You have come back to a land of plenty, my son,' said Mr. Effingham, 'as you have doubtless observed. If you had known that such rain was to fall, it might have saved you all the journey.'

'My dear sir,' answered Wilfred, 'don't flatter yourself that, myself excepted, one of our old society will be contented to live here again. The land we have reached opens out such an extensive field that no sane man would think of staying away from it. Rockley will follow, and half Yass, I believe. No one will be left but you and I and the Parson.'

'What an exodus! It amounts to a misfortune,' said Rosamond. 'It seems as if the foundations of society were loosened. We shall never be so happy and contented again.'

'We never may,' said Wilfred; 'but we shall be ever so much richer, if that is any compensation. Stock of all kinds are fetching fabulous prices in Port Phillip. By the bye, how is Dr. Fane? His store cattle are now worth more than the Benmohr fat cattle used to be.'

'We had Vera here for a whole month,' said Rosamond. 'She is the dearest and best girl in the whole world, I believe, and so handsome we all think her. She said her father had sold a lot of cattle at a fine price, and if he didn't spend all the money in books, they would be placed in easy circumstances.'

As Wilfred paced the verandah, smoking the ante-slumber pipe—a habit he had rather confirmed during his journeyings and campings—he could not but contrast the delicious sense of peaceful stillness with much of the life he had lately led. All was calm repose—amid the peaceful landscape. No possibility here of the wild shout—the midnight onset—as little, perhaps, of lawless deeds as in their half-forgotten

English home. A truly luxurious relief, after the rude habitudes and painful anxieties of their pioneer life.

The night's sound sleep seemed to have concentrated the repose of a week, when Wilfred awoke to discover that all outer life was painted in rose tints. That portion of the herd which had been left behind had profited by the unshared pasturage to such an extent that they resembled a fresh variety. Daisy and her progeny looked nearly as large as shorthorns, and extreme prices had been offered for them, old Andrew averred, by the cattle-dealers that now overspread the land.

A field of wheat, by miraculous means ploughed and harrowed, since the Hegira, promised an abundant crop.

'Weel, aweel!' said Andrew, who now appeared bearing two overflowing buckets of milk, 'ye have been graciously spared to return from yon fearsome wilderness, like Ca-aleb and Joshua. And to think o' that puir laddie, juist fa'en a prey to thae Amalekites, stricken through wi' a spear, like A-absolom! Maist unco-omon—ane shall be taen and the t'ither left. It's a gra-and country, I'm hearin'.'

'The finest country you ever set eyes on, Andrew. The Chase seems a mere farm after it. If it was not for the family, I should soon pack up and go back there.'

'I wadna doot. Rovin' and rampa-agin' aboot the waste places o' the yearth is aye easy to learn. But ye'll ken yer duty to yer forebears and the young leddies, Maister Wilfred, no' to tak' them frae this douce-like hame.'

'Oh yes, I know,' said Wilfred. 'Of course I shall stay here, and shall be very happy and make lots of money again. All the same, it's a wonderful new country. Half the people here will be wanting to get away when they hear about it. But how did you get this fine crop of wheat put in without working bullocks? I'm afraid, Andrew, you must have been taking a leaf out of Dick Evans's book, and using other people's cattle.'

'Weel, aweel!' said Andrew, looking doubtful, 'I winna deny that there micht be some makin' free wi' ither folks' beasties. But they were juist fair savin' their lives wi' oor grass parks, and when the rain fell, it was a case o' needcessity to till the land, noo that the famine was past.'

With regard to the 'fatal maid,' Wilfred Effingham had

much difficulty in reaching a determination worthy of a man who prided himself upon acting on logically defensible grounds. He was by no means too certain, either, that he could lay claim to Miss Christabel's undivided affections. So much of her heart as she had to give, he suspected was bestowed upon Bob Clarke. If that were so, she would cling to him with the headlong hero-worship with which a woman invests the lover of her girlhood, more particularly if he happens to be ill-provided with this world's goods.

The result of all this introspection was that Wilfred, like many other men, sought refuge in delay. There was no need of forcing on the decision. He had work to do at home for months to come. And the marriage question might be advantageously postponed.

Unpacking his valise after breakfast, he produced a number of newspapers, the which, as being better employed, he had not opened. Now, in the leisure of the home circle, the important journals were disclosed. Each one, provincially hungry for news, seized upon one of the messengers from the outer world. 'Ha!' said Wilfred suddenly, 'what is this? Colonel Glendinning, of the Irregular Horse, desperately wounded. Wonderful gallantry displayed by him. Chivalrous sortie from cantonments. Why, this must be our Major, poor fellow!'

He was interrupted by a faint cry from Beatrice, and looking round he saw that she had grown deadly pale. He had just time to catch her fainting form in his arms. But she was not a girl who easily surrendered herself to her emotions. Rousing herself, she looked around with a piteous yet resolved expression, and with an effort collected her mental forces.

'Mother,' she said, 'I must go where *he* is. Tell my father that I have always deferred to his wishes, but that now I *must* join him—I feel responsible for his life. Had I but conquered my pride, a word from me would have kept him here. And now he is dying—after deeds of reckless daring. But I must go; I will die with him, if I cannot save him.'

'Dearest Beatrice, there is no need to excite yourself,' said the fond yet prudent mother. 'You have only to go to your father. He will consent to all that is reasonable. I myself think it is your duty to go. Major Glendinning is

severely wounded, but good nursing may bring him round. I wish you had a companion.'

'Where could you have a better one than Mrs. Snowden?' cried Annabel hastily. 'She said she half thought of going home by India, and I know she does not care which route she takes. She has been there before, and knows all about the route. If papa would only make up his mind to go, half the trouble would be off his mind, and he would enjoy the voyage.'

'There could not be a more favourable time, my dear sir,' said Wilfred in the family council at a later hour. 'I shall be here now. It is a matter of life and death to poor Beatrice as well as to the Colonel. You had better arrange to start by the first vessel, and to bring back some Arab horses on your return.'

'It is the only thing to be done,' said Rosamond, who had just returned from her sister's room. 'I wouldn't answer for Beatrice's reason if she is compelled to wait here. She has repressed her feelings until now, and the reaction is terrible. It is most fortunate that Mrs. Snowden is ready to leave Australia.'

Subjected to the family pressure, aided by the promptings of his own heart, Mr. Effingham was powerless to resist. The acclimatisation question was artfully brought up. He at once yielded, and before the evening was over, a letter was in the mail-bag, requesting their Sydney agent to take passages by the first outward-bound boat for India, and to advise by post, or special messenger, if necessary.

Beatrice, informed of this determination, gradually recovered that calmness allied to despair which simulates resignation. She busied herself unweariedly in preparation for the voyage, cherishing the hope of soothing the last hours of her lover, if indeed it was denied her, to watch over his return to the world of love and hope.

Mrs. Snowden arrived on the following day, and cordially acceded to the proposition made to her, to share the adventures of the voyage and of Indian travel.

'If you knew,' she said, 'how grateful I feel for the opportunity of changing the scene of my sorrows and being of use to my friends after this lonely life of mine, you would not thank me. I would go many a mile by sea or land to

nurse the Major myself. Between me and Beatrice he will be well looked after.'

All circumstances seemed favourably shaped for the errand of mercy. A ship was about to sail for China, whence the opium clippers might be trusted for a swift run to the historic land. Almost before the news of the intended journey had reached Yass, so that the parson could drive over and express his entire concurrence with the arrangement, the little party had set out for Sydney.

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In the fulness of time the very last evening, before the Rockley family left Yass, arrived. All the party from The Chase had been in to say good-bye, and had returned. Some mysterious business kept Wilfred in town, and that special evening he of course spent at Rockley Lodge.

For it was not to be supposed that, on that momentous evening, the family declined to see their friends. In the 'Maison Rockley' the head of the house was so absorbed in his business pursuits that, except at dinner-time, and for an hour after, he could hardly be said to possess any family life whatever. He was grateful, therefore, for the presence of such friends who would take the burden of domesticity, in part, off his hands, and made no scruple of expressing, in the family circle, his thanks for such services.

It so turned out that, on this particular morning, he had found time, for once in a way, to give his daughter an earnest lecture about her ridiculous fancy, as he termed it, for Bob Clarke; a young fellow who, without any harm in him, would never come to much, or make any money worth speaking of, seeing that he was far too fond of those confounded horses, out of which no man had ever extracted anything but ruin, in Australia. That they had never heard a word from him for ever so long; most probably he was flirting away in Tasmania, and did not cast a thought upon her. And here was Wilfred Effingham, than whom he did not know a finer fellow anywhere—steady, clever, a man of family, and in every way desirable. If he liked her, Christabel—he couldn't say whether he did or not, he had no time to trouble about such rubbish—why didn't she take him, and have done with it, and settle down creditably for the rest of her life, instead of wasting her time and vexing her friends?—and so on—and so on.

Christabel wept piteously during this paternal admonition, delivered, as usual, with a loud voice and a fierce expression of countenance, but had gone away reflecting that although she was, so to speak, badly treated in this instance, yet, as she had succeeded in getting her own way all her life, she probably might enjoy a reasonable portion of it in the future.

Meanwhile, being fairly malleable and of the texture which is bent by circumstances, she began to consider, when alone in her room, whether there was not something of reason in her father's arguments. Here she was placed in the position of only having to accept. Of the true nature of Wilfred's feelings she herself had little doubt. There is something, too, not wholly without temptation to the female heart in the unconditional surrender of the lover, then and there urging his suit. There may be also a wild impulse to accept the inevitable, and thus for ever extinguish the uneasiness of anxiety and suspended judgment.

Then, Wilfred Effingham was very good-looking—fair perhaps in complexion, and she did not admire fair men, but brown-bearded, well-featured, manly All the girls voted him 'so nice-looking,' and the men invariably spoke of him as a good fellow. He was well off; he would have The Chase some day, and she would be the great lady of the Yass district, with her carriage and her servants; could entertain *really* well. She would also, beyond doubt, be envied by all her schoolfellows and girl friends.

The prospect was tempting. She thought of Bob's dark eyes, and their passionate look when he last said good-bye. She thought of the happy days when he rode at her bridle-rein, and would lean over to whisper the cheery nonsense that amused her. She thought of the thrill at her heart, the strange deadness in every pulse, when The Outlaw went down, and they lifted Bob up, pale and motionless; of her joy when he appeared next day on the course, with his arm in a sling, but with eyes as bright and smile as pleasant as ever. These were dangerous memories. But they were boy and girl then. Now she was a woman, who must think of prudence and the wishes of her parents.

Then Bob would be poor for many a day, if, indeed, he ever rose to fortune. Through her heart passed the uneasy dread,

which gently-nurtured women have, of the unlovely side of poverty, of shifts and struggles, of work and privation—of a small house and bad servants, of indifferent dresses, and few thereof. Such thoughts came circling up, like birds of evil aspect and omen, ready to cluster round the corse of the slain Eros.

Les absens sont toujours torts, says the worldly adage. In his absence, the advocacy for Bob Clarke was perhaps less brave and persistent than it would otherwise have been. The girl strove to harden her heart, by clinging to the prudent side of the case, and recalling her father's angry denunciations of any other course than an affirmative reply to Wilfred Effingham, should he this night tell her the real purport of his constant visits.

He himself had resolved to risk his fate on this last throw of the dice, and so far everything assisted his plans. Mr. Rockley was in an unusually genial frame of mind at dinner—cordial, of course, as ever, but unnaturally patient under contradiction and the delays consequent upon the cook's unsettled condition. Mrs. Rockley excused herself after that meal as having household matters to arrange. But Christabel, whose domestic responsibilities had always been of the faintest, was at liberty to remain and entertain Mr. Effingham and her father, indeed she was better out of the way at the present crisis. Wilfred had no thought of leaving early in order to accommodate his friends in their presumed state of bustle and derangement, for it was one of those rare households where visitors never seem to be in the way. None of the feminine heads of departments were fussy, anxious, 'put out,' or had such pressing cares that visitors came short of consideration.

Mrs. Rockley's talent for organisation was such that no one seemed in a hurry, yet nothing was left undone. The house was nearly always full of inmates and visitors, male and female, with or without children. Still, wonder of wonders, there was never any awkwardness or failure of successful entertainment. Rockley, personally, scoffed at the idea of being responsible for the slightest share of household management. He merely exacted the most complete punctuality, cookery, house-room and attendance for the ceaseless flow of guests, the cost of which he furnished, to do him justice, ungrudgingly. Whatever might need to be done next day

(if the whole family, indeed, had been ordered for execution, as Horace Bower said), William Rockley would have dined and conversed cheerfully over his wine, suggested a little music (for the benefit of others), smoked his cigar in the verandah, and mocked at the idea of any guest being incommoded by the probably abrupt translation of the family, or going away a moment before the regulation midnight hour.

Therefore, when Rockley told him that he hoped he was not going to run away a moment before the usual time for any nonsensical idea of being in the way because they were starting for Port Phillip on the next day (what the deuce had that got to do with it, he should like to know?), Wilfred fully comprehended the *bona fides* of the request, and prepared himself to make the most of a *tête-à-tête* with Miss C. Rockley, if such should be on the cards.

So it came to pass that while Mr. Rockley and Wilfred were lounging in the Cingalese arm-chairs, which still adorned the verandah, Christabel betook herself to the piano, whence she evoked a succession of dreamy nocturnes and melancholy reveries which sighed through the hushed night air as though they were the wailings of the Lares and Penates mourning for their dispossession.

'Bowerdale hasn't turned up,' said Rockley abruptly. 'The *Rebecca* has never been heard of. She sailed the day we left Melbourne. Queer things presentiments. You remember his saying he felt hypped, don't you?'

'Yes, quite well. What an awful pity that he should have persisted in going by her—after your warning, too!'

'Didn't like to lose his passage-money, poor fellow!' continued the sympathising Rockley. 'I'd have settled that for him quick enough, but he wasn't the sort of man to let any one pay for him. Leaves a wife and children too. Well, we must see what can be done. Fortune of war might have been our case if I hadn't taken Jackson's measure so closely.'

'Happy to think you did,' said Wilfred, with natural gratitude. 'If you had not been so determined about the matter, I should have risked the sea-voyage. I was tired of land-travelling.'

'We should all have been with "Davy Jones" now. No cigars, eh? This claret's better than salt water? I suppose we all have our work to do in this world; mine is not half

done yet; yours scarcely begun. By Jove! I forgot to leave word at the office about my Sydney address—where to send all the confounded packages, about a thousand of them. I'll run down and see that put straight. Don't you go till I come back. Tell Mrs. Rockley she must have a little supper ready for us.'

Rockley lighted a fresh cigar and plunged into the night, while Wilfred lost no time in repairing to the piano, which he managed to persuade the fair performer to quit for the verandah, under the assumption that the room was warm, and the night air balmy in comparison.

For a while they walked to and fro on the cool freestone pavement, talking on indifferent subjects, while Wilfred gazed steadfastly into the girl's marvellous eyes, ever and anon flashing under the soft moon-rays, as if he could read her very soul. She was dressed that evening in a pale-hued Indian muslin, which but partly veiled the exquisite graces of her form. How well he remembered it in after-days! There was a languor in her movements, a soft cadence in the tone of her voice, a quicker sympathy in her replies to his low-toned speech, which in some indefinable manner encouraged him to hope. He drew the lounges together, and telling her she needed rest, sat by her side.

'You are really going away,' he said; 'no more last farewells, and Heaven knows when we shall meet again. I feel unutterably mournful at the idea of parting from your mother, Mr. Rockley—and—yourself. My sisters were in the depths of despair yesterday. I don't think it affects *you* in the least.'

'Why should you think I am hard hearted?' asked the girl as she raised herself slightly, and leaning her face on her hand, curving the while her lovely rounded arm, looked up in his face with the pleading look of a spoiled child. 'Do you suppose it is so pleasant to me to leave our home, where I have lived all my life, and travel to a new place where we know nobody—that is, hardly any one?'

'How we all—how I,' said Wilfred, 'shall miss these pleasant evenings! How many a one have I spent in your father's house since we first met! I can safely say that I have never been so kindly treated under any roof in the whole world. As to your father, my dear old governor has always been too good, but I scarcely think he could do more for me than Mr. Rockley has done.'

'Papa is always kind, that is, to people whom he likes,' said Christabel with an absent indifference, as if Mr. Rockley's philanthropy and irritability, his energy and his hospitality, were qualities of much the same social value.

At that moment the moonbeam was darkened by a passing cloud, and Wilfred drew nearer to the girl until he could almost feel her breath upon his hair, and hear her heart palpitate beneath the delicate fabric of her dress.

'Christabel,' he said, 'ask your heart this night whether I am right in hoping that you will not accompany your parents to this rude settlement. Here you are known, honoured—yes, loved! Why leave one who would cherish you while life lasted?'

Christabel Rockley spoke not nor moved, but she cast her eyes down, till in the clear light the long dark lashes could be seen fringing her cheek. Her bosom heaved—she made no sign.

'Christabel,' he murmured, 'darling Christabel, I have long loved you, fondly, passionately. One word will make me the happiest of living men. Bow but your head in token that you grant my prayer, and I will take it as a sign from Heaven. Stay with my mother till she embraces you as a loved daughter. Only say the word. Will you try to return, in your own good time, my deep, my unalterable love?'

She raised her head and looked fixedly at him as he stood there, the embodiment of love's last appeal, in the direct path of the moon's rays. His face and form, instinct with strong emotion, seemed glorified by the flood of light in which it was encircled.

'I can hardly tell,' she said. 'I have been trying to think—asking myself if I can give you my heart, and this pale face of mine, that you set so much value on—foolish boy! I think I may, in a little while, if you will bear with me, but I would rather not say, for good and all, just at this moment. You *will* give me more time, won't you? Ah! what is that?' she suddenly broke off, with almost a shriek, as the roll of horse-hoofs smote clearly through the still night air upon the senses, almost upon the overwrought hearts of the listeners. 'Who can it be? Surely it isn't papa riding back on the warehouse-keeper's cob?'

Not so. The hoofs of no mortal cob ever rang upon turf

or roadway with the long, regular strokes of the steed of the coming horseman.

'A thoroughbred horse!' said Wilfred. 'Tired, too, by his rolling stride. Whoever can it be at this time of night?'

Then he saw Christabel's pale cheek faintly flush. How lovely was the warmer tint as it stole from cheek to brow, while her eye sparkled afresh like a lamp relumed. 'Only one person is likely to come here to-night to say good-bye to us,' she almost whispered. 'I did not think he would take the trouble. Oh, it can't be——'

As she spoke, the clattering hoofs ceased abruptly at the garden gate. A hasty step was heard on the gravel, and Bob Clarke, pale as death and haggard with fatigue, stood before them.

'I swore I would say good-bye,' he said. 'So I am here, you see. I have ridden a hundred miles to do it. Ha! Effingham! Back from Port Phillip? Christabel Rockley, answer me—am I too late?'

'Oh, Bob!' she cried, and as she spoke she rose and stood by his side, taking one hand in both of hers. 'You are not too late. But you will have to forgive me, and you, too, Wilfred Effingham, for being a silly girl that did not know her own mind. It would have served you right, Master Bob, and it will be a lesson to you not to put off important business. If Desborough had gone lame—I suppose it is he, poor fellow, that you have nearly ridden to death—you would have lost Christabel Rockley for good and all, whatever she may be worth. I was not sure, and papa was angry. But I am now—*I am now.* Oh, Bob, my dear old Bob, I will wait for you till I am a hundred if you don't make a fortune before!'

Bob Clarke looked doubtfully from one face to the other, scrutinising Wilfred's with a fierce, questioning glance. But as their eyes met he saw that which quenched all jealous fears.

'My dear fellow,' said Wilfred, coming forward and holding out his hand, 'you have had your usual luck and "won on the post." I congratulate you heartily, on my honour, as a man and a gentleman. Christabel has freely told you that but for your opportune arrival her hand might have been disposed of differently. You won't wonder that any man

should do his best to win her. But from my soul I can now rejoice that it was not so; that I have been spared the discovery, when too late, that her heart was yours—yours alone. Look upon me now as your lifelong friend. Let us keep our own counsel, and all will go well.'

'Wilfred Effingham has spoken like himself,' said Christabel, whose features were now illuminated with the pure light of love that knows neither doubt nor diffidence in the presence of the beloved one. 'You see, I should have had some excuse, Bob, if I had thrown you over, you procrastinating old stupid. Why did you leave me doubting and wondering all this time? However, I shall have plenty of time to scold you. Here comes papa at last.'

At this simple announcement the three faces changed as the well-known step of Mr. Rockley was heard—firm, rapid, aggressive. But the girl's features, at first troubled, gradually assumed a steadfast look. Bob Clarke raised his head, and drew himself up as if scanning the line of country. Wilfred Effingham's countenance wore the abstracted look of one raised by unselfish aims above ordinary considerations.

'I thought I should never get away from that confounded old idiot,' Mr. Rockley commenced. 'Why, Bob Clarke! where have you sprung from? We heard you had gone to Port Phillip, or Adelaide, or somewhere; very glad to see you, wherever you came from. Better stay to-night; we can give you a bed. Why the deuce didn't you take your horse round to the stable instead of letting the poor devil stand tied up at the gate after the ride he seems to have had? Christabel, perhaps you'll tell them to bring in supper. I feel both hungry and thirsty—giving directions, directions, till I'm hoarse.'

Christabel glided away, whereupon Bob Clarke faced round squarely and confronted his host.

'Mr. Rockley, I came here to-night to tell you two things. I apologise for being so late, but I only heard you were leaving yesterday. I have ridden a hundred miles to-day.'

'Just like you,' said Rockley; 'and why the deuce didn't you make them send you in supper all this time? You look as if you hadn't saved yourself any more than your horse.'

Truth to tell, Master Bob *was* rather pale, and his eyes looked unnaturally bright as he bent them upon the speaker.

'Plenty of time afterwards, sir,' he said; 'the business was important. First of all, Mr. Hampden has given me a partnership, and I am going to take up country in Port Phillip under the firm of Hampden and Clarke. The cattle are drafted and started—five hundred head of picked Herefords—Joe Curle is with them, and young Warner. I'm going by sea to be ready for them when they come over.'

'I'm sincerely glad to hear it, my dear Bob,' said Rockley in his most cordial manner—one peculiar to him when he had become aware of something to another man's advantage. 'Why, you had better come down with us this week in the *Mary Anne*. I've chartered her, and she is crammed full, but, of course, I can give any one a passage. I can't tell you how glad I am. Mrs. Rockley!' he cried out as that well-beloved matron appeared and held out her hand with a smile of good omen to the not fully reassured Bob, 'are we never to have anything to eat to-night? Here's Bob Clarke has ridden a hundred and fifty miles, and dying of hunger before your eyes; but, of course, of course'—here he changed into a tragic tone of injury—'if I'm not to be master in my own house——'

Mrs. Rockley, with her placid countenance, only relieved by a glance at Wilfred, swiftly withdrew, and Rockley, to whom it had suddenly occurred as he looked at Wilfred that complications might arise from his subjecting his daughter to the perilous companionship of a sea-voyage with so noted a detrimental as Bob Clarke, looked like a hound that had outrun the scent, desirous of trying back, but not quite certain of his line.

'Well, Bob, I am sure you will do well in Port Phillip; you have had lots of experience, and no man can work harder when he likes, I will say that for you; but it's a fast place, a very fast place, I tell you, sir; and if you give yourself up to that confounded racing and steeplechasing, I know what will come of it.'

'Mr. Rockley,' said Bob again, with the air of a man who steadies his horse at a rasper, 'I came to ask you for your daughter. I know I've not done much so far, but she likes me, and I feel I shall be successful in life or go to the devil—according to your answer this night.'

Mr. Rockley looked first at one and then at the other

of his young friends in much astonishment. This surprise was so great that for once he was unable to give vent to his ideas.

Before he could gather self-possession, Wilfred Effingham spoke. 'My dear Rockley, from circumstances which have come to my knowledge, but which I am in honour bound not to reveal, I can assure you that your daughter's happiness is deeply concerned in my friend Clarke's proposal. As a friend of the family—who takes the deepest interest in her future welfare—let me beg of you to give the matter your most favourable consideration.'

Mr. Rockley's face passed through the phases of wild astonishment and strong disapproval before he replied. It had then relaxed into one of humorous enlightenment.

'I see how it is. That monkey, Christabel, has enlisted you on her side. Well, I tell you both that I should have preferred Wilfred Effingham as my son-in-law. I am not going to hide my opinion on that or any other subject. But as she has made her choice, I will not—I say I will not—make her life miserable. Not that I have any objection to you, Bob, my boy, except on the score of that confounded horse-racing. It's very well in its way. No man enjoys a race more than I do; but it's not the thing for a young fellow who has his way to make in the world.'

'I'll never own another race-horse,' quoth Bob, with desperate self-renunciation, 'as long as I live, if——'

'Oh yes, you will,' said Mr. Rockley, with superior forecast; 'but what I want you to do is to promise not to go head and shoulders into it for the next few years, when you'll have all your work cut out for you, if you want to be a man and make a home for your wife and family. Well, it's done now, and here's my hand, my boy; you've got a good little girl, if she is a pretty one. But take my advice, don't give her too much of her own way at the beginning. Show that you intend to be master from the start, *put her down* if she shows temper; when she gives in, you can be as kind to her as you like afterwards. Better that than for her to have the whip-hand. Women don't understand moderation. That was always my way, wasn't it, Bessie?' he inquired, appealing to Mrs. Rockley, who having entered the room had come in for this piece of practical advice,

delivered in a loud tone of voice. 'I've been giving your future son-in-law—there he is; I know he is a favourite of yours; you needn't say he isn't—a useful piece of advice, which I hope he'll have the sense to act up to. Supper ready in the next room? I fancy we're all in want of a little refreshment; what do you think, Bob?'

That gentleman had private ideas upon the subject, but did not disclose them further than by looking over at Mrs. Rockley, and giving practical effect to the suggestion.

The *partie carré* enjoyed a cheerful but not very conversational repast. Wilfred and Bob Clarke felt more disposed to drink than to eat. Neither had much to say, so Rockley had it all his own way with Port Phillip speculations, advice to Bob Clarke of where to go for first-class cattle country, and how to manage economically for the first few years. Mrs. Rockley was tired, but found a few reassuring words for the anxious Bob, explaining that Christabel had a headache, but would be sure to be quite well in the morning. She also indicated her sympathy with Wilfred, and her approval of his generosity in backing up his rival's claim. This, she assured him, she nor Christabel would ever forget.

Finally, Mr. Rockley looked at his watch in the midst of a suggestion to buy more cattle on Hampden's account and take up two or three runs, inasmuch as it was all one trouble and not much more expense; when, discovering that it was past midnight, he broke up the parliament. Wilfred made his final adieus, and at daylight was fast leaving the town behind him, on his way to The Chase, accompanied by divers 'companions of Sintram,' in the guise of vain regret and dull despair, with also (though not unalloyed) a curious sense of relief.

Taking the most philosophical view of the subject, the after-taste of refusal by a woman is rarely exceeded in this life for corroding bitterness. The non-preference of oneself, to the average suitor, fills the individual, unless he be free from every tinge of vanity, with wrath and disgust. In vain the proverbial salve is applied by superficial comforters. The foiled fisherman will not be consoled. He will throw away his flies and burn his rod. Henceforth he and angling have parted for ever. Such in effect for a while is the lament of most men who have the evil hap to pin so much of their

present and prospective happiness upon one cast—and lose it. The proud man suffers deeply, in secret. The selfish man mourns for the loss of personal gain. The true and manly lover is shaken to the centre of his being. The vain man is wroth exceedingly with childish anger; furious that any woman should disdain him—*him!* The susceptible, fickle suitor, who promptly bears his incense to another shrine, is to be envied, if not commended. But

> To each his sufferings, all are men,
> Condemned alike to groan.

Who loves vainly is stricken with a poisoned arrow. The wound rankles in the flesh of every son of Adam, oft producing anguish, even unto death, long after the apparent hurt is healed.

Wilfred Effingham was not more than ordinarily vain. He had not been, in so many words, rejected. Indeed, he had been nearly accepted. But he could not disguise from himself that it amounted to much the same thing. Yet he reflected that he had cause to be thankful that the girl had not been permitted to complete the measure of her self-deception—to promise her hand where she could not truly have given her heart. Better far, a thousand times, that this should have happened beforehand, he thought, 'than that I should have seen after marriage the look that came into her eyes when they rested on Bob Clarke.'

He did not admit that permanent injury to his health would result from this defeat. It was not a crushing disaster, from which he could never rally. Rather was it a sharp repulse, useful in teaching caution. Brave men, great men, had profited by blows like this ere now. He would retire within his entrenchments — would perhaps be the better fitted to take the field in a future campaign.

A necessity lay upon him of acquainting his family with a portion, at any rate, of such momentous events. He did not go too deeply into his feelings for Christabel Rockley, yet permitted his mother and sisters to perceive that all probability of her appearing at The Chase as Mrs. Effingham, junior, was swept away by arrangement with Bob Clarke—duly ratified by the irrevocable if reluctant consent of Mr. Rockley.

His condition of mind was, doubtless, closely gauged by his relatives. With instinctive delicacy they ministered indirectly to his hurt spirit. While not displeased that the lovely Christabel had not appropriated the beloved, their Wilfred, they never permitted him to perceive how widely their estimate differed from his own. They counselled steady occupation, and led him to take pleasure once more in intellectual pursuits.

A diversion, happily, was effected in due time. He commenced to discover that his mental appetite had returned —that he could read once more and even *laugh* occasionally at the conceits of authors, much indeed as if his heart had not been broken. Then letters with good news from Beatrice and her father arrived. The voyage had been safe and speedy. On their arrival they had found the Colonel—such was his present rank—better than their fears had led them to expect. Ghastly and numerous, in all truth, were his still unhealed wounds; his state of weakness pitiable to see. But the fever from which he had suffered had left him. And when the eyes of the sick soldier met those of Beatrice Effingham, beaming upon him with a world of love and tenderness, all felt that a stage on the way to recovery had been reached. Such, too, came to be the opinion of the doctor and nurse, a portion of whose duties the two ladies had assumed.

Then letters came from the new country, *via* Port Phillip:—'The climate was more moist than that of New South Wales, but the water never failed, and the grass was beyond all description. Immigrants from all the world were pouring in fast; the place bade fair to be another Britain. Money was being made rapidly. Stock were any price you chose to ask. A cattle trade was springing up with Tasmania. Argyll thought he would go home for a couple of years, leaving Hamilton in charge. Fred Churbett was in great form, fully convinced that he was intended for a dweller in the waste places of the earth. He felt so happy and contented that he didn't think he would take a free passage to England, with a season box at the Royal Opera, if it were offered to him.'

As for Guy, all written symbols were inadequate to express the length, breadth, and depth of his happiness under

the new and romantic conditions. The cattle were doing splendidly—no one would know them. And no wonder—the feed was unparalleled. He had got up two good slab huts, a stock-yard, and a calf-pen. They were now splitting rails for a horse paddock.

The Port Phillip news (from Guy) became presently more sensational. The Benmohr people, with Ardmillan, Churbett, and the rest, had arranged to leave their stations for a while, and come to Yass for Christmas. A better time to get away might never come. There was no chance of bush-fires. The blacks were quiet. The cattle were thoroughly broken in; you couldn't drive them off the runs if you tried. There was nothing to do this year but brand calves. So they would turn up before Christmas Day.

He didn't think he would have been able to get away, but Jack Donnelly had offered to look after the run in his absence, and with old Tom there, no harm could come to the cattle. A couple of months would see them back, and he really thought they deserved a holiday.

Such intelligence had power to renovate the morale of the whole household, from Mrs. Effingham—who, in good sooth, had with difficulty kept up a reasonably cheerful appearance, in default of her absent husband and daughter—down to Mrs. Evans, expectant of the errant Dick.

Jeanie and Andrew were overjoyed at the tidings, and Duncan was at once despatched to Benmohr to acquaint Mrs. Teviot and Wullie with the glorious news, in case they had not as yet received a letter. But they had; and Mrs. Teviot threatened Duncan with the broom for daring to think 'her gentlemen wadna acquent her the vara meenute they kenned they could win hame to Benmohr.'

Comes then a letter from Sternworth. News had been received from O'Desmond, who had discovered a splendid tract of country beyond the lower Oxley marshes, hitherto considered impassable, and after remaining upon it during the winter and spring, was coming back to Badajos. *He* too hoped to arrive before Christmas. The long-vacant homes of the district would be again filled up, thank God!

'Won't it be delightful to see dear Guy again,' said Annabel, 'and to have the old house full once more, with friends and neighbours. I *must* kiss one of them. Mr.

Churbett, I think. You would not object to that, mamma, would you?'

'*He* would not,' said Wilfred. 'I don't wonder that you and Rosamond are delighted at the chance of seeing their faces again. It seems hard that fate should have decided to separate us. Either they should have remained here, or we should have pulled up stakes, like Rockley, and migrated there.'

'There is another friend coming that I shall be charmed to welcome—whom, like Annabel, I shall be ready to embrace, and indeed *shall* kiss on the spot.'

'Is my last belief in womanhood to be uprooted?' exclaimed Wilfred languidly. 'Is my immaculate sister Rosamond actually going to join the "fast" division?'

'You need not be alarmed,' she replied. 'It is only Vera Fane; and I did not speak of her visit before, because I was not sure she would be able to come.'

'Vera Fane!' said Wilfred. 'How does she happen to come our way? I thought she was in Sydney. Didn't some one say she was going to be married?'

'Oh, to that handsome cousin, Reginald, that came from England, *via* Melbourne, the other day. You heard that, did you? So did we, and were agonised at the thought of losing her for good. But she is coming up here at mamma's invitation, given long ago, to stay with us over January. Her father won't be at Black Mountain till then; he can't leave Norman, who has had a bad time with scarlet fever.'

'Well, you will have another lady in the house to fill Beatrice's place, and help to amuse your guests. She is quite equal to a pair of ordinary young ladies in the matter of rational conversation, perhaps more.'

'So Mr. Argyll thinks, evidently,' said Annabel; 'he paid her the *greatest* attention once he met her over here. I know she thinks him very clever and distinguished-looking. They would suit one another famously.'

'I don't think so at all,' said Wilfred shortly. 'But I must get away to my work.'

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RETURN FROM PALESTINE

MATTERS had been pleasant enough in the early days at Lake William, and the Benmohr men considered that nothing could be more perfect than their old life there. But this new region was so much more extensive, with a half-unknown grandeur, rendering existence more picturesque and exciting in every way. There were possibilities of fortunes being made, of cities being built, of a great Dominion in the future—vast though formless visions, which dwarfed the restricted aims of the elder colony. Such aspirations tended to dissuade them from residing permanently in their former homesteads.

But they were coming back for a last visit—a long farewell. There were friends to see, adventures to relate, transactions to arrange. A pleasant change from their wild-wood life, an intoxicating novelty; but once experienced, they must depart to return no more.

The absentees did not await Christmas proper, but arrived beforehand, having tempted the main in the yacht *Favourite*, sailing master Commodore Kirsopp, R.N., from Melbourne. Such passengers as Ned White, Jack Fletcher, Tom Carne, and Alick Gambier offered such an irresistible combination.

Once more the homesteads around Lake William appeared to awaken and put on their former hospitable expression. Mrs. Teviot had scrubbed and burnished away at Benmohr, until when 'her gentlemen' arrived, welcomed with tears of joy, they declared themselves afraid to take possession of their own house, so magnificently furnished and spotlessly clean did it appear to them after their backwoods experience.

Mr. Churbett stood gazing at his books in speechless

admiration (he averred) for half an hour; afterwards inspecting his stable and Grey Surrey's loose-box with feelings of wonder and appreciation. Neil Barrington declared that he was again a schoolboy at home for the holidays, not a day older than fourteen, and thereupon indulged himself in so many pranks and privileges proper to his assumed age that Mrs. Teviot scolded him for a graceless laddie, and threatened to box his ears, particularly when he kissed her assistant, an apple-cheeked damsel lured from one of the neighbouring farms in order to help in her work at this tremendous crisis.

Guy Effingham was hardly recognisable, so his sisters declared, in the stalwart youngster who galloped up to The Chase in company with Gerald O'More, whom he had invited to spend Christmas in his father's house. There was the old mischievous, merry expression of the eyes, the frank smile for those he loved; but all save his forehead was burned several shades darker, and a thick-coming growth of whisker and moustache had changed the boyish lineaments and placed in their stead the sterner regard of manhood.

Gerald O'More had also sustained a change. His manner was more subdued, and his spirits, though ready as of old to respond to the call of mirth, did not seem to be so irrepressible. He had altered somewhat in figure and face, having lost the fulness which marks the newly-arrived colonist, and along with the British fairness of complexion, sacrificed to the Australian sun, had put away the half-inquiring, half-critical tone of manner that characterises the immigrant Briton for his first year in Australia. He now ranked as the soldier who had shared in the toil, the bivouac, the marches of the campaign; no longer a recruit or supernumerary.

'He has never been so jolly since poor Hubert's death,' whispered Guy to Rosamond in their first confidential talk. 'He thought it was his fault that the poor chap wasn't able to defend himself. But he'll get over it in time. A better-hearted fellow couldn't be. He's a stunning bushman now, and a tiger to work.'

'What's "a tiger to work"?' asked Rosamond, laughing. 'I must make you pay a forfeit for inelegant expressions, as I used to do in old school-days.'

'I should never have known half as much,' said the boy,

as he turned to his sister with a look of deepest love and admiring respect, 'if it hadn't been for you, Rosamond. How early you used to get up on those winter mornings, and how Blanche and I and Selden hated the sound of that bell! But there's nothing like it,' he added with a tone of manly decision. 'I polished off a fellow about the date of the battle of Crecy in great style the other day. You would have been quite proud of me.'

'You keep up your reading, then, dear Guy, and don't forget your classics, though you are in the bush? When you go to England, some day, you must show our friends that we do more than gallop after cattle and chop down trees in Australia.'

'Oh, we have great reading at night, I can tell you; only those tallow candles are such a nuisance. I've got a new friend, a Cambridge fellow, just out from home, on the other side of me, and he's a regular encyclopædia. So, between him and the Benmohr people, I shan't rust much.'

'I am delighted to hear it. I hope you will have an Oxford man on your other side, as you call it. A literary atmosphere is everything for young people. Who is your other neighbour?'

'Jack Donnelly, and not half a bad fellow either. Though his father can't read or write, he knows Latin, but not Greek, and he's awfully fond of reading. You should hear the arguments he and Cavendish have—the Cambridge man, I mean.'

'What do they argue about?'

'Oh, everything—England and Ireland, Conservative and Democratic government, native Australians and Britishers. They're always at it. Jack's a clever fellow, and very quick; awfully good-looking too. You should see him ride. Cavendish says he'll make his mark some day—he's full of ambition.'

'It is very creditable of him to try. If his father had not cared for his children in that way, he might never have risen above his own grade. Young gentlemen, too, should maintain the position which they have inherited. Don't lose sight of that.'

'That's what Hamilton's always saying; he's a wonderful fellow himself. See him in town, you'd think he never had

his hands out of kid gloves, and yet he can keep time with the best working man we have, at any rough work.'

'You cannot have a better model, my dear Guy. Mamma and I are so thankful that you are among men who would do honour to any country.'

Great was the joy expressed and many were the congratulations which passed on both sides when the explorers returned. They had so much to tell about the new home, so much to admire in the old one. It was a suburb of Paradise in their eyes, with its cultured aspect and gracious inhabitants, after the untamed wilderness.

They were never tired of praising their former homes and neighbours. If, by some Arabian Nights arrangement, they could transport them bodily to the new colony, complete happiness, for once in this imperfect world, would be attained.

The Benmohrs found their apartments in apparently the same state of faultless order in which they had quitted them. No smallest article had been moved or changed. A velveteen shooting-jacket, which Argyll remembered hanging up just as he started, was the very object which greeted his eyes when he awakened after the first night in his own bed.

The worst of it was that the breaking up of all this comfort and domesticity would be so painful. The climate had changed permanently (people always jump to this conclusion in Australia directly they begin to forget the last drought), and was simply Elysian. The lake was full; once more they listened to the music of its tiny surges. But for choice, the new country was about ten times more valuable. The pleasant old station homesteads must go. However, they were here now for a spell of pure enjoyment, not to bother their heads with the future.

Money was plentiful, the gods be praised! Everything was *couleur de rose;* they would revel in ease and enjoyment with a free spirit until Christmas was over. The cares of this world might then have their innings, but by no means till the New Year chimes called them to new duties. There was nothing now but such pleasant rides and drives; lingering rambles, after the heat of the day; expeditions into Yass, where they were fêted as if they had included the South Pole in their discoveries. Mr. Sternworth alluded to their return

in his sermon, drawing tears from his congregation when he spoke of the strong, brave man they would never see more, whom many there present had known from childhood. But he had died as a Warleigh should die, doing his duty gallantly, and giving his life to save that of a comrade.

Before the third week of December had passed, another sensational arrival was chronicled. O'Desmond drove through the town on his way to Badajos in his four-in-hand, looking as if he had encountered no discomforts to speak of. His horses were in high condition; the bits and brasses were faultlessly polished; the drag hardly looked as if it had been a thousand miles from a coach-builder, much less covered up with boughs during the deadly summer of the waste.

But observers noted that Harry O'Desmond, upright and well set up as ever, was thinner and older-looking; that, although he received their greetings with his old stately cordiality, there was an expression upon his worn and darkened countenance rarely imprinted save by dread wayfaring through the Valley of the Shadow——

So had it been with him, in truth. Passing the farthest known explorations, his party came into a waste and torrid region, indescribably dread and hopeless. There, apparently, no rain had fallen for years. The largest trees had perished from desiccation of the soil; even the wild animals had died or migrated. The few they encountered were too weak to flee or resist. For weeks they had undergone fearful privations; had tasted the tortures of thirst and hunger, well-nigh unto death.

With men weakened and disheartened, O'Desmond knew that to linger was death. With a picked party of his long-tried followers he pushed on, leaving just sufficient to support life with the depôt. On the *very last* day which exhausted nature could have granted them they passed the barriers of the Land of Despair. They saw before them—such are the wondrous contrasts of the Australian waste—a land of water-pools and pastures, of food and fruit.

But simultaneously with their glimpse of the haven of relief came the view of a numerous, athletic party of blacks, clustered near the river-bank. For war or hunting, this section of the tribe had surely been detailed. There were no women or children visible—a bad sign, as the sinking hearts

of the emaciated wayfarers well knew. They were brave enough under ordinary circumstances of fight or famine. But this bore *too* hardly upon human nature, coming, as it did, after the toils and privations of the terrible desert.

But there was one heart among the fainting crew which neither hunger, thirst, nor the shadow of coming death had power to daunt. Aware that with savages a bold yet friendly bearing is the acme of diplomacy, O'Desmond decided upon his course.

The chief stood before his leading braves, doubtful if not hostile.

Suddenly recollecting that among his private stores, faithfully distributed, upon which alone they had been subsisting of late, was a package of loaf sugar, the idea flashed across his mind of tempting the palate of the savage.

Raising a handful of lumps of the rare and precious commodity, he advanced cheerfully and presented them to the leader, who regarded them distrustfully. His retinue stared with pitiless eyes at the wasted white weaklings. It was the supreme moment. Life and death swayed in the scales.

Harry O'Desmond so recognised it, under his forced smile, as he lifted one of the smaller fragments to his lips, and with great appearance of relish began to masticate. Slowly and heedfully did the chief likewise. The charm worked. The flavour of the far-borne product, for which so many of the men of his colour had died in slavery, subjugated the heathen's palate. He smiled, and motioned the others to advance. O'Desmond followed up his advantage. Every remaining grain was distributed. In a few minutes each warrior was licking his lips appreciatively. A treaty of alliance, offensive and defensive, was as good as signed.

That day the starving wanderers feasted on fish and flesh, brought in profusion by their new comrades. They had never seen a white man before, and were, like many of the first-met tribes, not indisposed to be peaceful.

When shown the encampment, the clothes, the equipment, the strange beasts, they pointed to the sky, snapping their fingers in wonder as they marked the leader's height and stalwart frame, but made no attempt to raid the treasures of the white 'medicine man.'

So the expedition was made free of a waste kingdom,

bisected by the deep-flowing stream of the Moora-warra, with its plains and forests, its lagoons and reed-brakes. And for long years after, until O'Desmond sold out the full-stocked runs for the high prices of the day, never was shot fired or spear lifted in anger between the dwellers on the Big River.

Wilfred had called at Badajos to congratulate their old friend. Upon his return he found that the household had received an important addition. Dr. Fane had ridden over with his daughter from Yass, and was with difficulty persuaded to rest for a few days at The Chase before returning to Black Mountain. Like most people who lead uneventful lives, he was in a hurry to get home, though compelled to admit that he had nothing particular to do when he got there.

The Parson had stolen a day, he said, and driven over with them, proud of the honour, he further stated, of taking charge of Miss Fane's impedimenta, which, though the most reasonable of damsels in that respect, could not be carried upon Emigrant. That accomplished palfrey she had brought over chiefly for the pleasure of having him to ride while at The Chase. Besides, his presence saved her a world of anxiety, as when they were separated she was always imagining that he had got out of his paddock, been stolen, or fallen lame, such accidents being proper to valuable horses in Australia.

So when Wilfred arrived he found every one in most cheerful and animated vein. Argyll was describing the features of the new country to Dr. Fane, who was deeply interested in its geological aspect; his daughter, apparently, had found the narrative, interspersed as it was with 'moving incidents by flood and field,' equally entertaining.

Mr. Sternworth, with Rosamond beside him, was questioning Hamilton about the spiritual welfare of the infant settlement of Melbourne; promising, moreover, a handsome subscription to St. James's, the new Church of England, at that time in course of erection. Gerald O'More, with Fred Churbett and Neil Barrington, was having an animated, not to say noisy, conversation with Annabel. Peals of laughter, of which a large proportion was contributed by the young lady, were the first sounds that met his ear upon entering

the room. All seemed so capable of mutual entertainment, without his aid, countenance, or company, that he was sensible of a *soupçon* of pique as he surveyed the festive scene.

However, he cordially welcomed Miss Fane and her father to The Chase, mentally remarking that he had never seen that young lady look so well before, or had thought her half so handsome. Her response did much to clear his brow and banish from his heart all unworthy feelings. The steadfast gaze was frank and kindly as of yore. She appeared unaffectedly pleased to see him again.

'You know you belong to the band of heroes whom we have felt so proud to honour upon their return,' she said. 'Papa has a famous classical parallel, I know, for your exploits and safe arrival at Lake William. He did explain it to me, but I have forgotten. Mr. Sternworth, what is it?'

'Never mind, Vera,' replied the old gentleman, 'I never talk Latin in the presence of young ladies. I can always find something more amusing to say. You must sing us those new songs you brought from Sydney. That would be more appropriate, wouldn't it, Mrs. Effingham?'

'I don't know much Latin, you unkind old godfather, but what I do know I am not in the least ashamed of.'

'Argyll's making the pace pretty good, isn't he, Fred,' remarked Neil Barrington, 'with that nice Miss Fane? She's the only "model girl" I ever took to. I'm her humble slave and adorer. But I never expected to have the great MacCallum More for my rival. Did you ever see him hard hit before, Fred?'

'Never, on the word of a gentleman-pioneer,' rejoined Mr. Churbett. 'It's this exploration, new country, perils-of-the-wilderness business that has done it. "None but the brave deserve the fair." *We* are the brave, sir, in this fortunate instance. We have solved the mystery of the unconquered Bogongs. We have gazed at the ocean outlets of the Great Lakes. We have proved ourselves to be the manner of men that found empires. Under the circumstances heroes always hastened to contract matrimonial alliances. Cortez did it. Dunois did it. William of Argyll is perilously near the Great Hazard. And I, Frederick de Churbett, am hugely minded to do likewise, if that confounded Irishman

would only leave off his nonsense and let a fellow get a word in edgeways.'

Mr. Churbett had reason for complaint, inasmuch as Gerald O'More, when his national gallantry was kindled to action, appeared determined to permit 'no rival near the throne,' as he successively devoted himself to Annabel, Rosamond, and Miss Fane, or indeed occasionally kept all engaged in conversation and entertainment at the self-same time. It became difficult to discover, for a while, so rapid as well as brilliant were his evolutions, whom he intended to honour with his exclusive admiration. At length, however, those who were in the position of calm spectators had no doubt but that Annabel, with whom he kept up a ceaseless flow of badinage and raillery, was the real attraction. If so, he was likely to find a rival in the sarcastic Ardmillan, with whom he had more than once bade fair to pass from jest to earnest. For the cooler Scot was in the habit of waiting until he saw his antagonist upon the horns of a dilemma, or luring him on to the confines of a manifest absurdity. This he would explode, blowing his rival's argument into the air, and graciously explaining his triumph to the surrounding fair.

Such was the satisfaction which filled the heart of Mrs. Effingham, that but for the absence of her husband and daughter she would certainly have gone the daring length of giving a party. But the absence of her husband was, to the conscience of the matron, an insuperable objection. No amount of specious argument or passionate appeal could alter her determination.

'My dears, it would be wrong,' she quietly replied, in answer to Annabel's entreaty and Rosamond's sober statement that there could not be any objection on the point of etiquette. 'Suppose anything should happen to your father or Beatrice about the time—travelling is so very uncertain—we should never have another happy moment.'

So the project, much to Annabel's openly expressed and Rosamond's inwardly felt disappointment, was given up. However, Mrs. Effingham relented so far as to say that, although her principles forbade her to give a party, there could be nothing indecorous in asking their friends to dine with them on Christmas Day, when the time for dear Guy's departure for the station would, alas! be drawing nigh.

This was a grand concession, and all kinds of preparations were made for the celebration of the festival. In the meanwhile, as there was next to nothing doing on any of the stations, what between riding-parties, chance visits, special arrivals for the purpose of bringing over new books or new music, it seemed as if The Chase had been changed into the caravanserai of the district. It would have been difficult to tell whether the neighbours lived more of their time with the Effinghams or at their own stations.

During this exciting season Wilfred Effingham was commencing to experience the elaborated torture of seeing the woman he *now* discovered to be his chief exemplar made love to by another man, apparently with prospects of success. When he set himself to work seriously to please, William Argyll was rarely known to fail. The restless spirit was stilled. The uncontrollable temper was lulled, like the wave of a summer sea. All the powers of a rare intellect, the stores of a cultivated mind, were displayed. Brave, athletic, of a striking personal appearance, if not regularly handsome, he was a man to whom few women could refuse interest, whom none could scorn. Besides all this, he was the heir to a fine estate in his native land.

When, therefore, day by day, he devoted himself in almost exclusive attendance to the appropriation of Miss Fane, keeping close to her bridle-rein in all excursions, monopolising her in the evenings, and holding æsthetic talks, in which she apparently took equal interest, the general conclusion arrived at was that Miss Fane was only awaiting a decorous interval to capitulate in due form.

Yet Wilfred was constrained to confess that however much he may have deserved such punishment, there was no change in her manner towards him. When he touched upon any of their old subjects of debate, he found she had not forgotten the points on which they had agreed or differed, and was ready, as of old, to maintain her opinions.

She seemed pleased to linger over reminiscences of those days and the confidences then made.

'Nobody would know Black Mountain now,' she said. 'Since we have grown rich, comparatively speaking, from "the providential rise in the price of store cattle" (as one auctioneer called it), papa has indulged me by making all

kinds of additions, and I suppose we must say improvements —new fences, new furniture, new stables, plants in the garden, books in the library. Money is the latter-day magician certainly.'

'And you are proportionately happier, of course,' said Wilfred.

'Frankly,' said Miss Fane, 'I am, just at present. I feel like one of Napoleon's generals, who were ennobled and enriched after having risen from the ranks. No doubt they enjoyed their new dignities immensely. If they didn't, their wives did. I won't say we were *roturiers*, but we were very, *very* poor. And it is so nice now to think we can dress as well as other people, and have the ordinary small luxuries of our position, without troubling about the everlasting ways and means.'

'We are much alike in our experiences,' answered Wilfred. 'We should soon have been absolutely ruined—the ways and means would have simply been obliterated.'

'I suppose so; but I never could believe in the poverty of any of you Lake William people. You seemed to have everything you could possibly want. The best part of our present good fortune is, that the boys are at a good school, while papa can buy as many new books as he can coax me, in mercy to his eyesight, to let him read. So I can say that we are quite happy.'

'I wonder you don't think of going to Europe. Dr. Fane could easily sell at a high price now; and then, fancy "the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them."'

'You are quoting the Tempter, which is not quite respectful to me—for once; but there is a reason why papa cannot bear the thought of leaving our dear, lonely old home. My poor mother was buried there, and his heart with her. For me, I have from childhood imbibed his feelings for the place of her grave.'

Rosamond here approached, and carried off her friend upon some mission of feminine importance. Wilfred, feeling that the conversation had taken a direction of melancholy which he could not fathom or adequately respond to, rejoined his other guests. But he could not help dwelling upon the fact that his conversations with Miss Fane seemed so utterly different from those with any other woman. Before the first

sentences were well exchanged, one or other apparently struck the keynote, which awakened sympathetic chords, again vibrating amid harmonious echoes and semi-tones.

To complete the universal jubilation, Mr. O'Desmond, in acknowledgment of the interest which the inhabitants of the district had shown in his safe return, announced his intention of giving an entertainment at Badajos on New Year's Day, at which amusements would be provided for his humbler neighbours as well as for the gentry of the district. He had ridden over to The Chase, and entreated Mrs. Effingham's advice as to decorations and dispositions. It was to be a *very* grand affair. No one who knew O'Desmond doubted but that, having undertaken such a project, he would carry it out with elaborate completeness. So that, among the young people and general population of the district, the Badajos Revels were looked forward to with intense expectation.

'What will the general plan of arrangement be?' said Fred Churbett to Hamilton. 'Something in the Elizabethan style, with giants, salvage-men, and dwarfs, speeches and poetical addresses to the Queen of the land, whoever she may be? Anyhow, he is going to spend a lot of money about it. I hear the preparations are tremendous.'

'In that case it will form a telling relief to the general lack of variety in these affairs,' said Hamilton. 'Every one has made such a heap of money now, that it hardly matters what is spent, in reason. We shall have to turn to hard work again in January. I wonder whether the old boy has fallen in love, like everybody else, and is going to make his proposals with what he considers to be "befitting accessories."'

'Shouldn't wonder at all,' said Fred. 'It appears to me that we are beginning to enter upon a phase of existence worthy of Boccaccio, without the plague—and the—perhaps unreserved narratives. It certainly is the realm of Faerye at present. The turning out into the world of fact will come rather hard upon some of us.'

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So matters passed on, materially unchanged, until the actual arrival of Christmas Day, on which sacred commemoration Mr. Sternworth, who had been temporarily relieved by the Dean of Goulburn, stayed with them at The Chase for

a week, and performed services to a reasonable-sized congregation in the dining-room, which was completely filled by the family, with friends and humble neighbours. On the evening before, too, which invested the service with additional feelings of hope and thankfulness, most satisfactory letters had been received from India. Mr. Effingham told how—

'The Colonel was recovering rapidly. His medical attendant advised a visit of at least two years to Europe. As the cold weather season had set in, he might take his passage. Beatrice and he were to be married before he left. He (Mr. Effingham) would sail for Australia directly the ceremony was over. Indeed, he was tired of India, and now that the Colonel, poor fellow, was recovering, would have been bored to death had it not been for his menagerie. Then followed a list of profitable and unprofitable beasts, birds, and even fishes, which, if he could transport successfully to The Chase, would make him a happy man for the rest of his life. People might say he was amusing himself, but the profits of some of his ventures would in days to come be *enormous*. For instance, take the Cashmere goats, of which he had succeeded in getting a small flock. The fine hair or "pushta," combed from near the skin, in contrast to the coarse outer fleece, was worth a guinea a pound. A shawl manufactured from it sold for a fabulous sum. These animals would thrive (he felt certain) in Australia; and then what would be the consequence? Why, the merino industry would be dwarfed by it—positively dwarfed!'

The family of this sanguine gentleman did not go the whole length of his conclusions, having found that some unexpected factor commonly interfered with the arithmetical working out of his projects. But they were delighted to think they should shortly see his face again. And Beatrice was to receive the reward of her unchanged love and devotion! She would have, dear girl, a lifelong claim to care for the health and happiness of him whom she had, as the Surgeon-General averred, 'raised up from the dead.'

Files of Indian papers showed that on every side honours and decorations had been heaped upon the gallant and now fortunate soldier. Here was one of the mildest extracts—

'Colonel Glendinning, V.C., has been made a Companion of the Bath. He will probably be knighted. But will the

country tolerate this tardy and barren honour? Of his stamp are the men who have more than once saved India. If the present Government, instead of making promotions at the bidding of parliamentary interest, would appoint a *proved leader* as Commander-in-Chief, Hindostan might be tranquil once more and Russia overawed.'

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DUEL IN THE SNOW

Just before the commencement of the stupendous festivities of Badajos, a letter arrived, by which the parson was informed that Mr. Rockley, having business at Yass, had resolved to run up from Port Phillip and see them all. Mr. St. Maur, who had an equally good excuse, would accompany him.

This was looked upon as either a wondrous coincidence or a piece of pure, unadulterated good luck. When the hearty and sympathetic accents of William Rockley were once more heard among them, everybody was as pleased as if he, personally, had been asked to welcome a rich uncle from India.

'I never dreamed of seeing St. Maur in these parts,' said Neil Barrington. 'He's such a tremendous swell in Melbourne that I doubted his recognising us again. What business can he possibly have up here?'

'Perhaps he is unwilling to risk a disappointment at the game which will be lost or won before January, "for want of a heart to play,"' said Ardmillan. 'He may follow suit, like others of this worshipful company. Hearts are trumps this deal, unless I mistake greatly.'

'Didn't we hear that he had been left money, or made a fortune by town allotments down there? Anyhow he's going home, I believe; so this will be his last visit to Yass for some time.'

'If we make money at the pace which we have been going for the last year, we shall all be able to go home,' pronounced Ardmillan. 'Yet, after all the pleasant days that we have seen here and at Benmohr, the thought is painful. This influx of capital will break up our jolly society more com-

pletely than the drought. In that case we should have had to cling to a sinking ship, or take to the boats; now, the vessel is being paid off, and the crew scattered to the four winds.'

'Sic transit,' echoed Neil lugubriously. 'I forget the rest; but wherever we go, and however well lined our pockets may be, it is a chance if we are half as happy again in our lives as we have been in this jolly old district.'

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Christmas had come and gone. The Badajos Revels were imminent. Rockley and St. Maur had declared for remaining until they were over, in despite of presumably pressing engagements.

'I believe old Harry O'Desmond would have made a personal matter of it if we had left him in the lurch,' said Mr. Rockley. 'He spoke rather stiffly, St. Maur, when you said all Melbourne was waiting to know the result of our deputation to the Governor-General, and that they would be loth to take the excuse of a country picnic.'

'The old boy's face was grim,' said St. Maur; 'but I had made up my mind to remain. I like to poke him up—he is so serious and stately. But we should not have quarrelled about such a trifle.'

In the meantime, terrific preparations were made for the fête; one to be long remembered in the neighbourhood. O'Desmond's magnificence of idea had only been held down, like most men of his race and nature, by the compulsion of circumstances. Now, he had resolved to give a free rein to his taste and imagination. It was outlined, in his mind, as a recognition of the enthusiasm which had greeted his return to the district in which he had lived so long. This had touched him to the heart. Habitually repressive of emotion, he would show them, in this form, how he demonstrated the feelings to which he denied utterance.

In his carefully considered programme, he had by no means restricted himself to a single day or to the stereotyped gaieties of music and the dance. On this sole and exemplary occasion, the traditional glories of Castle Desmond would be faintly recalled, the profuse, imperial hospitalities of which had lent their share to his present sojourn near the plains of Yass. Several days were to be devoted to the reception of

all comers. Each was to have its special recreation; to include picnics and private theatricals, with dresses and costumes from a metropolitan establishment. A dinner to the gentry, tradespeople, and yeomen of the district; to be followed by a grand costume ball in a building constructed for the purpose, to which all 'the county' would be invited.

'What a truly magnificent idea!' said Rosamond Effingham, a short time before the opening day, as they all sat in the verandah at The Chase, after lunch and a hard morning's work at preparations. 'But will not our good friend and neighbour ruin himself?'

'Bred in the bone,' said Gerald O'More. 'Godfrey O'Desmond, this man's great-grandfather, gave an entertainment which put a mortgage on the property from that day to this. Had a real lake of claret, I believe. Regular marble basin, you know. Gold and silver cups of the Renaissance, held in the hands of fauns, nymphs, and satyrs—that kind of thing—hogsheads emptied in every morning. Everything wonderful, rich, and more extravagant than a dream. Nobody went to bed for a fortnight, they say. Hounds met as usual. A score of duels—half-a-dozen men left on the sod. County asleep for a year afterwards.'

'The estate never raised its head again, anyhow,' said Mr. Rockley, 'and no wonder. An extravagant, dissolute, murdering old scoundrel, as they say old Godfrey was, that deserved seven years in the county gaol for ruining his descendants and debauching the whole country-side. And do you believe me, when I mentioned as much to old Harry one day, he was deuced stiff about it; said we could not understand the duties of a man of position in those days. I believe now, on my solemn word, that he'd be just as bad, this day, if he got the chance. I daren't say another word to him, and I've known him these twenty years.'

'Let us hope there won't be so much claret consumed,' said Miss Fane. 'I believe deep drinking is no longer fashionable. I should be grieved if Mr. O'Desmond did anything to injure his fortune. It may be only a temporary aberration (to which all Irishmen are subject, Mr. O'More), and then our small world will go on much as before.'

'If we could induce a sufficient number of Australian ladies to colonise Ireland,' said O'More, bowing, 'as prudent

and as fascinating as Miss Fane,' he continued, with a look at Annabel, 'we might hope to change the national character. It only wants a dash of moderation to make it perfect. But we may trust to O'Desmond's colonial experience to save him from ruin.'

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Thus the last hours of the fortunate, still-remembered year of 1840 passed away. A veritable jubilee, when the land rejoiced, and but few of the inhabitants of Australia found cause for woe. Great were the anxious speculations, however, as to weather. In a *fête champêtre*, everything depends upon that capricious department. And this being 'a first-class season,' unvarying cloudlessness could by no means be predicted.

The malign divinities must have been appeased by the sacrifices of the drought. A calm and beauteous summer morn, warm, but tempered by the south sea-breeze, bid the children of the Great South Land greeting.

The New Year opened radiantly as a season of joy and consolation. The whole district was astir from earliest hours; the preparations for the momentous experiences of the day were utterly indescribable, save by a Homeric Company of Bards (limited).

As the sun rose higher,

> From Highland, Lowland, Border, Isle,
> How shall I name their separate style,
> Each chief of rank and fame,

with his 'following,' appeared before the outer gates of Badajos, where such a number were gathered as would almost have sufficed to storm the historic citadel, in the breach of which Captain O'Desmond had fallen, and from which the estate had been named.

The first day had been allotted to a liberally rendered lawn party, which was to include almost the whole available population of town and district, invited by public proclamation as well as by special invitation. Indeed, it had been notified through the press that, on New Year's Day, Mr. O'Desmond would be 'at home' prepared to receive *all* his friends who desired to personally congratulate him upon his return from the interior.

Never was there such a muster before, since the first gum-tree was felled, within sight of Yass Plains. An uninterrupted procession wound its way steadily on from the town, from all the country roads, down gullies, and across flats and marshes. Every farm sent its representative. So did every shop in the town, every station in the district. Not a woman in the land had apparently remained at home. Who minded the infant children on the 1st of January 1840 will always remain an unsolved mystery.

The arrangements had been carefully considered by a past-master of organisation; and they did not break down under the unprecedented strain. As the horsemen and horsewomen, tax-carts, dog-carts, carriages, tandems, waggons and bullock-drays even, arrived at the outer gate, they were met by ready servitors, who directed them, through a cunningly devised system of separate lanes, to temporarily constructed enclosures, where they were enabled to unharness and otherwise dispose of their draught animals and vehicles.

Sheds covered with that invaluable material the bark of the eucalyptus had been erected, and hay provided, as for the stabling of a regiment of cavalry; while small paddocks, well watered and with grass 'up to their eyes' (as the stock-riders expressed it), suited admirably those not over-particular rovers, who, having turned loose their nags, placed their saddles and bridles in a place of security, and thus disembarrassed themselves of anxiety for the day.

When these arrangements had been satisfactorily made, they were guided towards the river-meadow, on a slope overlooking which the homestead and outbuildings were situated. Here was clustered an encampment of tents and booths, of every size and shape, and apparently devoted to as many various classes of amusement and recreation.

The short grass of the river flat, as it was generally called, was admirably adapted for the present purposes and intentions. The propitious season, with its frequent showers, had furnished a fair imitation of English turf, both in verdure and in thickness of sward, the latter quality much assisted by the stud flock of the famed Badajos merinoes.

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The concluding day of the memorable Badajos Revels, the unrivalled and immortal performance, had arrived. The

last act was about to be called on. All the arrangements had been more than successful. The sports and pastimes had gone through without hitch or contention. The populace was enthusiastic in praise of the liberality which had ministered so lavishly to their amusement. The aristocracy were no less unanimous in their approbation. That battues, the picnics, the costume ball, had been, beyond all description, delightful, fascinating, well carried out, in such perfect taste —extraordinary good form—intoxicating—heavenly—utterly, indescribably delicious; the adjectives and superlatives varying with the age, position, sex, or character of the speaker.

And now the modern miracle-play was to finish with a presentment, unique and marvellous beyond belief. The main body of guests and revellers had departed soon after daylight. 'Conclamatum est, Poculatum est,' said a young Irish priest. 'I shall have to go into "retreat" if Father Mahony gets word of me at the ball. ¡Wasn't I Lord Edward Fitzgerald to the life? But I durstn't stay away an hour longer from my flock.' Many were the half-repentant, homeward-bound wayfarers who held similar opinions. And the continuous passage of the fords of the Yass River might have suggested to the Scots, by birth or extraction, King James' army after Flodden—

> Tweed's echoes heard the ceaseless plash,
> While many a broken band,
> Disordered through her currents dash,
> To gain the Scottish land.

There was not, it is true, such need for haste, but the pace at which the shallower fords were taken might have suggested it.

However, a considerable proportion of the house parties and guests of the neighbouring families, with such of the townspeople and others whose time was not specially valuable, remained for the closing spectacle. Much curiosity was aroused as to the nature of it.

'Perhaps you can unfold the mystery of this duel which we are all taking about,' said Annabel to St. Maur, with whom she had been discussing the costumes of the ball.

'I happen to be in O'Desmond's confidence,' he replied; 'so we may exchange secrets. Many years ago, in Paris, he

fell across an old picture representing a fatal duel between Masks, after a ball. So he pitched upon it for representation, as a striking if rather weird interlude.'

'What a strange idea! How unreal and horrible. Fancy any of the people here going out to fight a duel. Is any one killed?'

'Of course, or there wouldn't be half the interest. He proposes to dress the characters exactly like those in the picture, and, indeed, brought up the costumes from town with him. Your brother, by a coincidence, adopted one—that of a Red Indian. It will do for his second.'

'Thoroughly French, at any rate, and only for the perfect safety of the thing would be horrible to look at. However, we must do whatever Mr. O'Desmond tells us, for *years* to come. I shall be too sleepy to be much shocked, that's one thing. But what are they to fight with? Rapiers?'

'With foils, which, of course you know, are the same in appearance, only with a button on the end which prevents danger from a thrust.'

'Wilfred, my boy!' had said O'Desmond, making a progress through the ball-room on the preceding night, 'you look in that Huron dress as if you had neglected to scalp an enemy, and were grieving over the omission. Do the ladies know those odd-looking pieces of brown leather on the breast fringe are *real scalps?* I see they are. You will get no one to dance with you. But my errand is a selfish one. You will make a principal man in that "Duel after the Masquerade" which I have set my heart upon getting up to-morrow.'

'But in this dress?'

'My dear fellow, that is the very thing. Curiously, one of the actors in that weird duel scene is dressed as a Huron or Cherokee. You know Indian arms and legends, even names, were fashionable in Paris when Chateaubriand made every one weep with his Atala and Chactas? You could not have been more accurately dressed, and you will lay me under lasting obligation by taking the foils with Argyll, and investing your second with this dress.'

'With Argyll!' echoed Wilfred with an accent of surprise.

'I know he is called the surest fencer in our small world, but I always thought you more than his match. He never, to my mind, liked your thrust in tierce.'

'You are right,' said Wilfred. 'Grisier thought me perfect in that. I shall meet him with pleasure. If only to show him—— Bah! I am getting so infected with the spirit of your Masquerade that one would think it a real duel. Command me, however.'

'A thousand thanks. Not later than three to-morrow afternoon. The ladies will not forgive us if we are not punctual.'

From Wilfred Effingham's expression of relief one might have thought that he had received good tidings. Yet, what was it after all—what could it lead to? A mock duel; a mere fencing match. What was there to clear his visage and lighten his heart in such a game as this?

A trifle, doubtless. But William Argyll was to be his antagonist. Towards him he had been unconsciously nurturing a causeless resentment, which threatened to drift into hatred. Argyll was sunning himself daily (he thought) in the smiles of Vera Fane, pleased with the position and confident of success. And though she, from time to time, regarded Wilfred with glances of such kindly regard that he was well-nigh tempted to confess his past sins and his present love, he had resolutely kept aloof.

Why should he court repulse, and only be more hopelessly humiliated? Did not all say—could he not see—that Miss Fane was merely waiting for Argyll's challenge to the citadel of her heart to own its conquest and surrender?

The Benmohr people, who knew something of everything and did not suffer their knowledge to decay for lack of practice, were devoted to fencing. Their lumber-room was half an armoury, holding a great array of foils, wire masks, single-sticks, and boxing-gloves. With these and a little pistol practice the dulness of many a wet afternoon had been enlivened. Perhaps in their trials of skill those with the foils were most popular.

This was Argyll's favourite pastime. A leading performer with all other weapons, he had a passion for fencing, for which his mountain-born activity pre-eminently fitted him. Effingham, a pupil of the celebrated Grisier, was thought to be nearly, if not quite his match. And more than once Argyll's hasty temper had blazed out as Wilfred had 'touched him' with a succession of rapid hits, or sent the foil from his

hand by one of the artifices of the fencing school. Now, however, a trial would be afforded, the issue of which would be final and decisive. To each the requisite notice had been given, and each had accepted the chances of the contest. No one in future would be able to assert that this or that man was the better swordsman.

A larger gathering took place at luncheon than could have been expected. Many were the reasons assigned for the punctuality with which all the ladies showed up. Fred Churbett, indeed, openly declared that the gladiator element was becoming dangerously developed, and that it would be soon necessary to shed blood in good earnest, to enjoy a decent reputation with the ladies of the land.

'I saw O'Desmond's people making astounding changes in the anterior of the amphitheatre, Miss Annabel, from my bedroom window this morning. I should not be surprised at the arena being changed to an African forest, with a live giraffe and a Lion Ride, after Freiligrath. Do you remember the doomed giraffe? How

> With a roar the lion springs
> On her back now. What a race-horse!'

'I should not be surprised at anything,' said Annabel. 'Badajos is becoming an Enchanted Castle. How we shall endure our daily lives again, I can't think. Every one is going home to-morrow, so perhaps the spell will be broken. Heigh-ho! When are we to be allowed to take our seats? I shall fall asleep if they put it off too long.'

'At three o'clock precisely the herald's horn will be blown, and we shall see what we shall see. I hope Argyll will be in a good temper, or terrible things may happen.'

'What is this about Mr. Argyll's temper?' said Miss Fane. 'Is he so much more ferocious than all the rest of you? I am sure that *I* have seen nothing of it.'

'Only my nonsense, Miss Fane,' said Fred, instantly retreating from his position. 'The best-hearted, most generous fellow possible. Impetuous and high-spirited, you know. Highlanders and Irishmen—all the world, in fact, except that modern Roman, the Anglo-Saxon—are inclined to be choleric. Ha! there goes the bugle.'

All were ready, indeed impatient, for the commencement.

Many acquaintances had indeed ridden out from Yass, and reinforced the spectators. Mr. Rockley had appeared at lunch—scarcely in the best of tempers—and had given vent to his opinion that it was quite time for this foolery to be over. Not that he made this suggestion to O'Desmond personally.

When the entrances were thrown open, and the spectators pressed into their seats with something of the impatience which in days of old seems to have characterised the frequenters of the amphitheatre, a cry of delighted surprise broke from the startled guests.

In order to reproduce the accessories of the imaginary conflict with fidelity of detail, O'Desmond has spared no trouble. The Bois de Boulogne had been simulated by the artifice of transplanting whole trees, especially those which more closely resembled European evergreens. These had been mingled with others stripped of their foliage, by which deciduous deception the illusion of a northern winter was preserved. A coating of milk-white river sand had been strewn over the arena, imparting the appearance of the snow, in which the now historical masqueraders fought their celebrated duel. By filling up the openings left for windows, and excluding the sun from the roof as much as possible, an approach to the dim light proper to a Parisian December morning was produced. As hackney-coaches appeared, one at either end of the arena, and driving in, took their stations under trees, preparatory to permitting their sensational fares to alight, the burst of applause both from those familiar with the original picture, and others who were overcome by the realism of the scene, was tremendous. And when forth stepped from one of the carriages a Red Huron Indian, and with stately steps took up his position as second, to so great and painful a pitch rose the excitement among the ladies that 'the boldest held' her 'breath for a time.'

Pierrot now, with elastic springing gait, moved lightly forward towards his antagonist, a reckless Debardeur, who looked as if he had been dancing a veritable 'Galop d'Enfer' before he quitted the 'Bal d'Opera.' Each performed an elaborate salute as they took their ground. The seconds measured their swords punctiliously.

As the enthusiasm of the crowd broke forth in remark

and exclamation, before the first passes were interchanged, Harry O'Desmond himself made his appearance among the ladies, and took his seat between Rosamond Effingham and Miss Fane, prepared to receive the shower of congratulations at once poured upon him.

'Yes, I *have* taken a little trouble; but I am amply repaid, Miss Effingham, if I have succeeded in adding to the amusement of my lady friends. For those I have the honour to address'—and here the gallant *impresario* looked as if the lady beside him had but to ask for a Sultan's circlet, to have it tossed in her lap—'what sacrifices would I not make?'

'Our distinguished host is becoming desperate,' thought Rosamond. 'I wonder who *she* is? I am nearly certain it is Vera Fane. He and the Doctor are great friends. Now I think of it, he said the other day that she was, with one exception, the pearl of the district. Mamma, too, has been hinting at something. A nice lady neighbour at Badajos would be indeed a treasure.'

'What an exciting piece of sword-play this will be, Mr. O'Desmond,' she said. 'One cannot help thinking that there is something real about it. And I have an uneasy feeling that I cannot account for, such as I should call a presentiment, if all were not so perfectly safe. What do you say, Vera?'

'I say it is a most astonishing picture of a real duel. I ought to enjoy it very much, only that, like you, I feel a depression such as I have never had before. Oh, now they are beginning! Really it is quite a relief.'

'I must take a foil with the winner,' said O'Desmond, 'if you think it is so serious, just to see if I have forgotten my Parisian experiences. It reminds one of the Quartier Latin, and the students' pipes—long hair and duels—daily matters of course. Ha! a wonderfully quick carte and counter-carte. There is something stirring in the clink of steel, all the world over, is there not, Miss Effingham?'

The pictured scene was accurately reproduced. Each man, with his second, fantastically arrayed. The nearer combatant, in his loose garb, had his sword-arm bared to the elbow, for the greater freedom required with the weapon. Four other men, picturesquely attired, were present. Of these, two stood near to him whose back was towards the

part of the theatre where the Effinghams and Miss Fane were sitting.

The contest proceeded with curious similitude to an actual encounter. Attack and defence, feint and challenge, carte, tierce, ripeste, staccato, all the subtle and delicate manœuvres of which the rapier combat is susceptible, had been employed, to the wonder and admiration of the spectators.

It was evident, before they had exchanged a dozen passes, that the men were most evenly matched. Much doubt was expressed as to who would prove the victor.

Latterly, Wilfred, who, with equal tenacity and vigilance, had the cooler head, commenced to show by small but sure signs that he was gaining an advantage. Step by step he drew his antagonist nearer to him, and employing his favourite thrust, after a brilliant parry, touched him several times in succession. At each palpable hit the spectators gave a cheer, which evidently disturbed Argyll's fiery temperament. He bit his lip, his brow contracted, but no token, excepting these and a burning spot on his cheek, showed the inward conflict. Suddenly he sprang forward with panther-like activity, and for one second Wilfred's eye and hand were at fault, as, with a lightning lunge, Argyll delivered full upon his adversary's chest a thrust, so like the real thing that, though the foil (as the spectators imagined) passed outside, the hilt of the mimic weapon rapped sharply, as if he had been run through the body. At the same moment he sank down, and was scarcely saved from falling, while Argyll, impatiently drawing back his weapon, threw it down and turned as if to leave the scene—half urged by his second—as was the successful combatant in the weird picture.

'Why—how wonderfully our brave combatants have imitated the originals, Mr. O'Desmond?' said Rosamond, with unfeigned admiration. 'The Debardeur sinks slowly from the arms of his second to the ground; his sword-point strikes the earth; his comrade and the Capuchin bend over him. They act the confusion of a death-scene well. His antagonist casts down his blood-stained sword—why, it *looks* red—and hurries from the spot.'

'Yes,' O'Desmond continued, 'everything is now concluded happily, successfully, triumphantly, may I say; it needs but, dearest Miss Effingham, that I should offer you——'

What Mr. O'Desmond was minded to offer his fair neighbour can never be known, for at that moment a shriek, so wild and despairing, rent the air, that all conversation, ordinary and extraordinary, ceased.

More astonishing still, Miss Fane sprang from her seat, and rushing into the arena with the speed of frenzy, knelt by the side of the defeated combatant, and with every endearing epithet supported his head, wringing her hands in agony as she gazed on the motionless form beside her.

O'Desmond, leaping down without a thought of his late interesting employment, gave one glance at the fallen sword, another at the fallen man, and divined the situation.

'By ——!' he said, '*the button has come off the foil*, and the poor boy is run through the body. He'll be a dead man by sundown.'

'Not so sure of that; keep the people back while I examine him,' said Mr. Sternworth, pushing suddenly to the front. 'Stand back!' he cried with the voice of authority. 'How can I tell you what's wrong with him if you don't give him air? Miss Fane, I entreat you to be calm.'

He lowered his voice and spoke in softened tones, for he had seen a look in Vera Fane's face which none had ever marked there before. As she knelt by the side of the wounded man, from whose hurt the blood was pouring fast, in a bright red stream; as with passionate anxiety she gazed into his face, while her arms supported him in his death-like faint, her whole countenance betrayed the unutterable tenderness with which a woman regards her lover.

The spectators stood assembled around the ill-fated combatant. Great and general was the consternation.

The nature of the mischance—the loss of the button which guards the fencer in all exercises with the foil—was patent enough to those acquainted with small-sword practice. But a large proportion of the crowd, with no previous experience of such affairs, could with difficulty be got to believe that Argyll had not used unjustifiable means to the injury of his antagonist. These worthy people were for his being arrested and held to bail. His personal friends resented the idea. Words ran high; until indeed, at one time, it appeared as if a form of civic broil, common in the middle ages, would be revived with undesirable accuracy.

Now, alas! the festive aspect of the scene was abruptly changed. O'Desmond's grief at this most untoward ending to his entertainments was painful to witness. Argyll's generous nature plunged him into a state of deep contrition for his passionate action.

The women, one and all, were so shocked and excited by the sight of blood and the rumour, which quickly gained credence, that Wilfred Effingham was dying, that tearful lamentations and hysterical cries were heard in all directions. Nor indeed until it was authoritatively stated by the medical practitioner of the district, who was luckily present, that Mr. Effingham having been run through the body, had therefore received a dangerous but not necessarily fatal wound, was consolation possible.

This gentleman, however, later on would by no means commit himself to a definite opinion. 'Without doubt it was a critical case. Though the cœliac axis had been missed, by a miracle, the vasa-vasorum blood-vessel had suffered lesion. The left subclavian artery had been torn through, yet, from its known power of contraction, he trusted that the interior lining would be closed, when further loss of blood would cease. Of course, unfavourable symptoms might supervene at any moment—at any moment. At present the patient was free from pain. Quiet—that is, absolute rest—was indispensable. With no exciting visits, and—yes—with the closest attention and good nursing, a distinctly favourable termination might be—ahem—hoped for.'

But an early doom, either alone or with all the aids that affection, friendship, ay or devoted love, could bring, was not written in the book of fate against Wilfred Effingham's name. In the course of a week the popular practitioner alluded to had the pleasure of informing the anxious inhabitants of the Yass district 'that the injury having, as he had the honour to diagnose, providentially not occurred to the trunk artery, the middle coat of the smaller blood-vessel had, from its elastic and contractile nature, after being torn by the partially blunted end of the foil, caused a closure. In point of fact, the injury had yielded to treatment. He would definitely pledge himself, in fact, that the patient was bordering upon convalescence. In a week or two he would be ready to support a removal to The Chase, where doubtless his

youth, temperate habit, and excellent constitution would combine to produce a complete recovery.'

These agreeable predictions were fulfilled to the letter. Yet was there another element involved in the case, which was thought to have exercised a powerful influence, if, indeed, it was not the chief factor in his recovery. The vision of sudden death which had passed before the eyes of the guests at Badajos had surprised the secret of Vera Fane's heart. Of timid, almost imperceptible growth, the faint budding commencement of a girl's fancy had, all in silence and secrecy, ripened into the fragrant blossom of a woman's love. Pure, devoted, imperishable, such a sentiment is proof against the anguish of non-requital, the attacks of rivalry, even the ruder shocks of falsehood or infidelity. Let him, then, to whom, all unworthy, such a prize is allotted by a too indulgent destiny, sacrifice to the kind deities, and be thankful. It may have been—was doubtless—urged by Miss Fane's admirers, that 'that fellow Effingham was not half good enough for her, more especially after his idiotic affair with Christabel Rockley'; but, pray, which of us, to whom the blindly swaying Eros has been gracious, is not manifestly overrated, nay, made to blush for shortcomings from his early ideal?

So must it ever be in the history of the race—were the secrets of all hearts known. Let us be consoled that we are not conspicuously inferior to our neighbours, and chiefly strive, in spite of that mysterious Disappointment—poor human nature—to gain some modest eminence. Let Wilfred Effingham, then, enjoy his undeserved good fortune, *comme nous autres*, assured that with such companionship he will be stronger to battle for the right while life lasts.

'How could you forgive me?' he said, at the close of one of the happy confidences which his returning strength rendered possible. 'I should never have dared to ask you after my folly.'

'Women love but once—that is, those who are worthy of the name,' she said softly. 'I had unwisely, it would seem, permitted my heart to stray. It passed into the possession of one who—well, scarce valued sufficiently the simple offering. But you do *now*, dearest, do you not? I will never forgive you, or rather, on second thoughts, I *will* forgive you, if hereafter you love any other woman but me.'

'You are an angel. Did I say so before? Never mind. Truth will bear repetition.'

. . . . . .

Old Tom Glendinning commenced to fail in health soon after the permanent settlement of the district; his detractors averred, because the blacks left off spearing the cattle and took to station work. He lived long enough to hear of General Glendinning's marriage, at which he expressed great satisfaction, coupled with the hope that the Major (as he always called him) would return to India, 'av it was only to have another turn at thim murdtherin' nay-gurs, my heavy curse on thim, from Bingal to Galantapee.'

He was carefully nursed by Mrs. Evans, who had at length followed her husband to the new country, after repeated assurances that it was impossible for him to return to Lake William, but that she might please herself.

They buried the old stock-rider, in accordance with his last wishes, on an island in the lake, within sight of Guy's homestead, near his ancient steed Boney, who had preceded him in decease. The dog Crab survived him but a few weeks, and was carefully interred at his feet. It was noticed that no black of any description whatever, young or old, male or female, wild or tame, would ever set foot on the green, wave-washed islet afterwards

Andrew and Jeanie, after a few years, retired to a snug farm within easy distance of The Chase, at which place, for one reason or other, they spent nearly as much time as at home. Andrew's aid was continually invoked in agricultural emergencies, more particularly when business called Wilfred away; while Jeanie's invaluable counsel and reassuring presence, when the inmates of Mrs. Wilfred's nursery developed alarming symptoms, was so largely in request that Andrew more than once remarked that 'he didna ken but what he saw far mair o' his auld dame before he had a hame o' his ain. But she had aye ta'en a' her pleasure in life at ither folk's bedsides. Maist unco-omon!'

Duncan, having once enjoyed an independent life in the new country, could not be induced to return to The Chase. He saved his money, and with national forecast commenced business in the rising township of Warleigh. Of this settlement he became in time the leading alderman (the burgesses

obtained a municipality in the after-time), and rose finally to be mayor.

The *Melbourne Argus* printed *in extenso* Mr. Cargill's address to the electors of West Palmerston when a candidate for a vacancy in the Legislative Council. It was certain he would be returned at the head of the poll, doubtless to represent a Liberal Ministry before long. May there never be invited a less worthy personage to the councils of the land than the Hon. Duncan Cargill, M.L.C.

Mr. Rockley, after his return to Port Phillip, hurled himself with his accustomed energy at every kind of investment. Not satisfied with extensive mercantile transactions, he bought agricultural lands, the nucleus of a fine estate. In Parliament he made such vigorous, idiomatic onslaughts upon the Government of the day as led the Speaker occasionally to suggest modification. He developed Warleigh, the town to which he had originally attached himself, wonderfully, and besides aiding all struggling settlers in the bad times, which arrived, as he had prophesied, close on the heels of inflation and over-trading. In a general way he benefited by good advice, friendly intercourse, and substantial assistance, everybody with whom he came into contact. As a magistrate, a perfect Draco (in theory), he was never known to remit a fine for certain offences. It was whispered, nevertheless, that he had many a time been known to pay such out of his own pocket.

It is comforting to those who honour liberality and unselfishness to know that he amassed a large fortune. He continued to invest from time to time in land, the management of which chiefly served to occupy his mind in declining years. When the grave closed over the warm heart and eager spirit of William Rockley, men said that he left no fellow behind him. There are still those who believe him to have been unsurpassed for energy of mind and body, with a clear-headed forecast in affairs, joined to the warm sympathy which rendered it impossible to omit a kindness or forgo a benefit.

The larger portion of the estate was willed to Christabel and her husband, but from the number of junior Clarkes of all sorts and sizes who fill the commodious family drag, a considerable subdivision of landed property will probably take place in another generation. Bob Clarke adopted easily the

position of country gentleman. He no longer rides steeplechases, but his four-in-hand team is certainly superior in blood, bone, matching, and appointments to anything south of the line.

But little remains to tell. Our small community reached that stage when, as with nations, the less history needed the better for their happiness. As to this last apocryphal commodity (as some have deemed), Wilfred Effingham avers that Vera and he have such a large supply on hand that he is troubled in spirit only by the thought that something in the nature of evil *must* happen, were it only in accordance with the law of averages.

The Port Phillip investments paid so well that, upon the sale of Benmohr by Argyll and Hamilton, he purchased that ever-memorable historic station. Mrs. Teviot and Wullie remained in possession almost as long as they lived, but never could be brought to regard Mr. Effingham in any other light than that of a neighbour and a visitor of 'their gentlemen.' He was often reminded of the muddy winter evening when he first arrived.

Dean Sternworth—thus promoted—lives on, growing still more wonderful roses, and experiencing an access of purest pleasure when a Marie Van Houte or Souvenir de Malmaison excites the envy of the district.

Marrying, christening, and, indeed, burying the inhabitants of Yass—for death also is in Arcadia—his unobtrusive path is daily trodden, 'and, sure the Eternal Master found, his single talent well employed.'

Among his chief and enduring pleasures are his monthly visits to Lake William to perform service in the freestone church, which has been erected by the Effingham family and their neighbours on a spot easy of general access. On such occasions Dr. Fane is generally found at The Chase, where the friends argue by the hour together. Such a period of continuous mutual entertainment must it have been that, on one occasion, was familiarly referred to by Master Hubert Warleigh Effingham as lasting 'till all was blue.'

Howard Effingham has once more been placed by circumstances in the enviable position of a man who has nothing in this world to attend to but his favourite hobby, to which he is sufficiently attached to devote every moment of his

spare time to it. That fortunate ex-militaire has now few other foes to consider than the native cat (dasyura), the black cormorant, and the dingo.

It must be confessed that they give him more trouble than ever—in his youth—did the Queen's enemies. The cormorants eat his young fish, and when the captain extracted from the dead body of one of them no less than six infantine trout, the tears (so his grandson averred) came into his eyes. The partridges, even the gold and silver pheasants were not sacred from the native cat. An occasional dingo makes his appearance, wandering from Black Mountain (the doctor was always an indifferent 'poisoner,' says the parson), and a brace of gazelle fawns have never been sufficiently accounted for. But the exhibition of strychnine crystals provides a solution, and the land has peace.

On the whole, progress has been made. The furred, feathered, or finned emigrants are steadily increasing; fair shooting can soon be allowed, and extermination will be impossible.

Between ourselves, a leash of foxes were turned loose in the gibba-gunyahs, near which the first dingo was killed, by the Lake William hounds, and Jack Barker swore (only he 'stretches' so) that he saw the vixen feeding five cubs—one with a white tag to his brush (Jack is always circumstantial), with the biggest buck 'possum he ever saw.

The Lake William hounds have long been back in their kennels. John Hampden makes a point of attending the first meet, and O'Desmond (whose heart was not broken, or was at least successfully repaired by his subsequent marriage) is a steady supporter, as of yore.

But somewhow the whole affair doesn't feel so jolly as when Argyll and Hamilton, Ardmillan and Forbes, Fred Churbett and Neil, Malahyde and Edward Belfield—all the 'Benmohr mob' in fact—were safe for every meet.

Perhaps, though with enthusiasts his steady march is disregarded, old Time may possibly have had something to do with the decrease of enthusiasm. Mrs. Wilfred does not approve of her husband riding so hard as in the brave days of old. She herself, from circumstances, is often absent, and scarcely enjoys lending Emigrant, still *nearly* as good as ever, to lady visitors. A heavy autumn shower, too, acted un-

favourably upon the health of the M.F.H., and explained practically what lumbago most closely resembles.

Still Howard Effingham, nobly loyal to his ideal, presses gallantly forward to the realisation of his hopes. The coming year will see an opening meet of the Lake William hounds, such as, in *one* respect, at least, was never ridden to in Australia before.

On some grey-hued, red-dawning May morn, freshly recalling, like the verse of an old song, how many a hunting day of yore, will he view a *fox* away from the upper corner of the ti-tree covert, on the rocky spur of the yellow-box range —a *real* fox—as red, as wiry, with as white a tag to his brush as ever a straight-goer that stretched across the pastures before the Pytchley or the Quorn. Nevertheless *Australian born and bred.*

Standing in his stirrups, he watches the leading hounds pour through the paddock fence, the remainder settling to the scent, or at silent speed sweeping over the forest parks that border the lake meadows. Rosamond St. Maur is far away, alas! and Fergus out at grass; but Major-General Sir Walter Glendinning, on leave from India, is trying the speed of the best Arab in the Mofussil. Mrs. O'Desmond is watching her husband anxiously, Guy is home from Port Phillip, with Bob Clarke and Ardmillan, each on a horse 'fit to go for a man's life,' and wild with frolic spirits. Mrs. Vera Effingham is out, and, as luck would have it, ready and willing to remind Emigrant of old Black Mountain days. John Hampden, taking The Caliph by the head, now snow white, but still safe across timber, echoes back Wilfred's 'Forrard, forrard, away!' as he sails off with the lead, and forgetting his wife and family, feels perfectly, ecstatically happy. Then, and then only, will Howard Effingham acknowledge that he has at length achieved the position of which he has so often dreamed—then will he hold himself to be in real, completest earnest—an Australian Squire.

THE END

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